Dear Friends,

Please join us on Sunday, May 16, for our **ANNUAL SPRING CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**. Highlights of this meeting will include: *Ratification of the 2021-2022 Leadership Slate; Written Reports from Ministry & Committee Chairs; and Treasurer’s Report.*

By a majority vote of both the Administration and the Ministries Boards, this meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. Information on Zoom participation will be provided in an e-blast a few days before the scheduled meeting.

- **What:** Annual Spring Congregational Meeting
- **When:** Sunday, May 16, 2021, at 12:15 p.m.
- **Where:** Via Zoom

Please note that only corporate members may vote at congregational meetings, and we need a quorum of such members to conduct the business of the church. It is very important that you attend!

Our bylaws require that when a congregational meeting is held electronically, we must also schedule an informational **FORUM** at least seven days prior the meeting. The forum will be held via Zoom on Wednesday night, May 5, at 7 p.m. This would be a great opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have.

- **What:** Informational Forum
- **When:** Wednesday, May 5, 2021, at 7 p.m.
- **Where:** Via Zoom

These regular meetings are important to the life of our beloved church. Your participation matters, and we look forward to seeing your smiling faces!

In hope and optimism,

*Tricia Aynes*

Moderator
Easter Sunday at IUCC was glorious!

Photos from Tricia & Jim Aynes, Pastor Sarah, & Jeff Oleson
Seniors for Racial Justice includes some familiar faces from our church. Even more IUCC allies joined them on April 22, 2021, for a vigil at a busy street corner in Irvine in support of Asian-Americans who are facing an increase in hate crimes right now. IUCC Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano was there to lend support and encouragement.

Photos courtesy of Tricia & Jim Aynes
When I was a child we’d take strawberry baskets and thread ribbon through them, pick flowers and stuff ‘em in the baskets, then creep over to our neighbors’ homes to place them on their doorstep, ring the bell, run away and watch from a distance as they opened the door and found their May Day present! Sweet old Mr. and Mrs. Spottie next door, and the round bellied older man across the street, the policeman down the way - each neighbor dramatically exclaiming with joy so the two Halverson kids could hear and all could celebrate that spring had really sprung!

As I get older, May Day has come to mean more than flowers and neighborly love, although I don’t want to discount the importance of either the beauty of the earth or the value of cultivating friendships among neighbors. However, as I expanded my own worldview, I realized that May Day is the International Day of the Worker. For years now, May Day demonstrations for worker rights have been the way I’ve welcomed this new month with grocery workers, janitors, and hotel workers shouting “Sí se puede!” - a celebration of integrity, cultural connection and a cry for justice!

This year I’m mindful of how workers have been affected by the pandemic, how so many of the low wage workers I’ve stood with in solidarity have become heroes on the front lines, or like so many of the hotel workers I’ve known over the years, have been furloughed, hopeful that May will not only bring flowers, but also a return to work. When I think about my different celebrations of May Day, I realize that at heart, they are really both about neighborly love and treating our neighbor as ourselves.

I hope that your embrace of May will include both this celebration of spring, children, neighbors, and flowers and a mindfulness of workers around the world who do so much to contribute to our privileged well-being. We should also contribute to their well-being. We’re all in this together, and as we’re called to love our neighbor, we’re called to work for each other too as we live out our Biblical mandate to love our neighbor as ourselves and maybe even share a little bit of beauty with one another!

May flowers certainly make me feel like spring has sprung! There is a newness in the air! The longer days pronounce light at the end of our long dark tunnel! Our Easter celebration of resurrection was embodied in our first in-person worship, and our Admin Board has signed on to a re-opening plan that will cautiously bring us back inside our sanctuary with a service this month on Pentecost. It feels like the perfect day to celebrate the birth of the Church as we celebrate a re-birth in our return to communal worship. You can sign up to worship with us by going to our website and reserving your spot!

This month we’ve got a lot to celebrate. Pentecost is a favorite holy day for me, but we’ll also be observing “PAAM Sunday” on May 2nd, which highlights the United Church of Christ’s Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries. I’m pleased to welcome three UCC pastors to share their voices, stories and words of good news! Now more than ever it feels like we need to pause, listen, and uplift, and since this is Asian Heritage month this feels like the perfect time. We’ll also be celebrating Mother’s Day (May 9th) and the women in our lives who have stepped in by chance or choice and loved us, reflecting that feminine divine love. And one of the days I’m most looking forward to is Youth Sunday, which will feature sermons from Nikhil Strasma and Ava Mitchell as they lead IUCC children and youth in a spirit-filled Sunday on May 16th.

I am continually surprised by just how active our church is and how dynamic our worship experiences are - especially when they’re online! I’m looking forward to the opportunities to be in person with you, to delight in the Spirit reflected in you, as we continue this vital ministry together!

May you bloom with love and celebrate in community!

Your Pastor,
Sarah
May is a month of transition for IUCC – at least, the beginnings of transition – back into a more “normal” form of doing things. The Administration Board has approved a re-opening plan, for both worship and groups, and we’ll start to see some signs of renewed busyness in the coming months.

Not everything will be the same right away, of course; we’re still following CDC and state/county restrictions for the appropriate “tier.” And we want to operate with caution, making sure to be mindful of the most vulnerable among us.

Please remember to contact me at the church office if you would like to meet on church grounds; there are guidelines you will be asked to agree to and follow.

The Seekers will be one of our first groups meeting on-site! Starting this month, you’ll find the Seekers in Plumer Hall again, around the familiar tables. Thank goodness for vaccines!

Ken Wyant will be leading Tuesday Bible Study in a deep exploration of the book of Genesis – home of the Creation stories, Noah and the Flood, and the legends about Israel’s founding family. For the present, the group will continue to meet online – you can find the Zoom info each week in Tuesday’s email update.

Our Wednesday study of the Hebrew scriptures has moved into the books of 1 & 2 Kings, which will complete the study of the Old Testament’s “historical” narrative. We’ll stay online through the summer, too; watch that Tuesday email update for Zoom info!

And look elsewhere in this newsletter, and in the Tuesday and Friday email updates each week, for news about Diversity & Inclusion, Green Faith, and Women’s events.

I want to close with a word of sincere thanks to all those who have helped keep IUCC active and moving forward during the last year-plus. Together we have accomplished so much more than any of us expected when the quarantine began in March 2020. Your support and participation keep the work and witness of IUCC alive!

We’ve asked our members to share their stories of what IUCC has meant to them. The responses have been heartwarming and meaningful. We’d love to hear your story! If you would like to share it in the newsletter, please send it to the editor at tricia_aynes@yahoo.com

What IUCC Means to Me

Jeff and I were both brought up in families with a religious tradition. Jeff’s family was Episcopal and mine was Catholic. As we each left home, got married, and raised our families, we eventually parted from our churches.

Jeff and I have now been together over 33 years. As our relationship developed, we decided we wanted a church home. We tried several denominations and congregations and searched on and off for several years.

Two different friends suggested that we might like their church, IUCC. We eventually decided to give it a try. We were welcomed and greeted by many in the congregation and felt comfortable with the group. Pastor Paul conducted the service and his message spoke to us personally. WE WERE HOOKED!

This was the Church Home we had been seeking. We told our closest friends, Jeff and Duane, about IUCC; and they agreed to attend one Sunday with us.

We all four joined IUCC together. There were many Sundays when the four of us were sitting together and during the sermon all of us had tears running down our faces because the message truly hit home.

We’ve now been members for nearly 11 years. We have seen many changes and growth.

This past year, due to Covid, we have missed being in the company of our church family, but we are happy that IUCC has remained a voice in the community. It remains as a great example of progressive Christianity and our programs strive to better the lives of those in our community.

Our Story

by Bill Lawrence & Jeff Stuckhardt

What IUCC Means to Me

by Bill Lawrence & Jeff Stuckhardt
It’s been a busy month for IUCC! At its April meeting, the Admin Board approved a plan for reopening our facilities, both for worship and for group events. We’ll start off slowly and increase from there. Worship will take place in-person in the sanctuary once a month for the next two months (on May 23 and June 27), at 9:30 a.m. only. Then starting on July 11, there will be live worship in the sanctuary every week at 9:30 a.m. After Labor Day, starting Sept. 12, we plan to return to a two-service schedule on Sunday mornings (9:30 & 11:00 a.m.). The 9:30 in-person services will be live-streamed on Facebook and recorded for viewing at 11 a.m.

Our in-person services will be in the sanctuary with appropriate distancing, and the congregation will be masked. Attendance will be limited at first, with numbers increasing as guidelines ease. Music will be provided live by the choral interns, music director, and accompanist, with no congregational singing or reading during May-August. No items will be distributed or hymnals used.

Our internal IUCC groups can decide for themselves whether they want to meet in-person, online, or in some type of hybrid format. Large screen TVs in the new meeting rooms can facilitate hybrid meetings. Starting May 1, our internal groups are invited to meet on-site if they wish, with hybrid option, following CDC guidelines.

Another exciting decision by the Admin Board will bring about a long-desired change in the wages of our lowest paid staff members (mostly staff in our preschool). Back in 2017, our UCC General Synod adopted a resolution calling on member churches to pay staff not less than $15 an hour, to take effect not later than 2019. California law would have required us to achieve that minimum for an employer our size no later than January 1, 2023. While we could have waited until we were required to do this, a chorus of voices insisted that it should happen sooner rather than later because it was a matter of justice. Due to recent changes in the tax law, it looks like we will be able to take advantage of a one-time opportunity to finally bring our staff up to a wage of $15 per hour.

The Nominating Committee’s list of recommended leaders (see page 8) will be put before you for ratification at the Spring Congregational Meeting to be held virtually (via Zoom) on Sunday, May 16, at 12:15 p.m. I hope you will plan to attend this meeting, which should be a joyful one! In addition to voting on the leadership slate, we’ll be receiving reports from our ministry and committee chairs and hearing a treasurer’s report. Please plan to attend – not only do we want to see your smiling faces, we need your presence for a quorum so we can conduct the business of the church!

There is much to celebrate at IUCC, and I’m so glad you are part of this beloved community. Happy Spring, my friends. Let’s get ready to face our reopening with open hearts, open minds, and a zest for all the good things we can do together!

P.S. You’ll note that this issue contains a number of articles about racism and justice. That wasn’t planned, it just worked out that way. It’s an indicator that many of us are grappling with recent events and doing our best to make sense out of them. We are coming from different ages, backgrounds and perspectives, all of which are valid and meaningful. We can learn a lot about each other from sharing our stories, and those stories form the beautiful mosaic that is IUCC. I hope you find the reflections of your fellow congregants as insightful and enlightening as I did.
Radiant Health Centers provides the LGBTQ+ community with medical services that are compassionate and comprehensive while continuing to serve those living with and affected by HIV. They also serve the mental health and nutritional needs of the LBGBTQ+ individuals who are economically stressed. Like all services, Radiant has been hard hit by the COVID pandemic, and their food pantries have been decimated by heightened demand.

The following list represents needed food items that can be dropped off at the bin outside IUCC from Monday - Thursday between 9:30 and 4:30.

**Breakfast Items**
- Pancake mix (16-20 oz)
- Pancake Syrup (10-12 oz)
- Oatmeal (18 oz)
- Cheerios
- Canned Soups
- Canned Meat
- Canned Meals
- Canned Vegetables
- Canned Fruit
- Canned Beans
- Pasta Sauce
- Tomato Sauce

**Dry Goods**
- Rice
- Pasta

**Miscellaneous**
- Peanut Butter (10-16 oz)
- Jelly (10-16 oz)
- Cooking Oil (16 oz)
- Hot Chocolate
- Crackers (individual packets)
- Teas (in bags)
- Shelf-Stable Milk
- V8 Juice
- Macaroni and Cheese

**Pet Food**
- Dried and Canned Cat & Dog Food

**Travel-Size Toiletries**
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Hand & Body Wash
- Toothbrush & Toothpaste

Many thanks from your Mission & Service Ministry !!!

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**Renew!**

**The 2021 Strengthen the Church Offering**

The Strengthen the Church Offering furthers the work of our conference and the national UCC as we work together to strengthen and renew existing congregations, fund leadership development, and provide exciting new programs for youth and young adults.

**Mother's Day - May 9, 2021**

You may mail your check to the church office (memo: STC Offering) or donate online at iucc.org/giving.

**Strengthen the Church**

a UCC Special Offering on Sunday, May 9

Please give as you’re able! The Keep & Till Congregation in the Central Atlantic Conference honors rural life and faith by focusing on agrarian rhythms, ecological concerns, and creation care. Keep & Till received a grant to stabilize and improve their community garden during the pandemic.

Pastor Samuel Chamelin explains the impact of the grant: “The quarantine made in-person activities more difficult, but it also helped us to understand the value of gathering together. While Keep & Till elected not to worship in-person in any capacity, we did continue to meet in the garden, masked and socially distanced, to continue our ag work (which is spiritual work also). This exposed us to new friends and neighbors in a way that we did not expect.”

The grant literally funded the renewal of the garden. Mulch enriched the soil. A 250-gallon trough increased the water capacity. Organic pest control improved the overall yield.

But most significantly, people in the neighborhood came out to spend time in the garden. Pastor Samuel saw a renewal in people. “When a tornado destroyed the tool shed, one of those new families stepped forward to offer their old shed, in good shape. We had community members come out to hang with us and assist, and they brought real help to the garden project. Then, they noticed that we had issues with weeds and poison ivy. The family used their flame thrower to eliminate the problems. Later, we discovered that others were mowing some particularly weedy areas. And then, finally, we realized neighbors were helping each other harvest food for their tables.

In this way, Keep & Till truly became a member of the community. Though our interactions were not how we might hope them to be, we saw growth in our community, integration with the surrounding neighborhood, and stories of generosity and sharing.”
Nominating Committee Proposed Officers for 2020-2021

The Nominating Committee (Tricia Aynes, Daniel Blackburn, Felicity Figueroa, Randy Romine, and Pastor Sarah) has proposed the following slate of officers to be voted on at the Spring Congregational Meeting on May 16:

**Moderator**
Tricia Aynes

**Administrative Board**
- Admin Board Chair: Daniel Blackburn
- Treasurer: Mark Allen
- Admin Board Clerk: Laura Palen
- Congregational Reps (3): Jon Ingal, Chuck Heath, Shanthi Nataraj

**Ministries Board**
- Ministries Board Chair: Felicity Figueroa
- Ministries Board Clerk: Karolyn Fencl
- Adult Programs Chairs: Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi/Craig Repp
- Advocates Chairs: Craig Repp
- Communication Chairs: Cindy O’Dell/Alex Ingal
- Congregational Care Chairs: Kathi Smith/Diane Rust
- Deacons Chair: -----
- Diversity & Inclusion: Jenna McCarty/Lesli Mitchell/Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi
- Fellowship Chair: Alyssa Cornett
- Hospitality Chair: Alex Ingal
- Membership Chairs: Randy Romine/Kaytee McDonald
- Ministry for Young People: Lauren Louie/Ava Mitchell
- Mission & Service Chairs: Steve Goetz/Sharon Lynn
- Music Ministry Chair: Pat Sauter
- Stephen Ministry Chairs: Jeanne Maag/Cheryl Trobiani
- Worship Chair: Craig Tyrl

**Committee Chairs**
- Building & Grounds Chair: -----
- Bylaws/P & P Chair: Anne Rosse
- Child Care Committee Chair: Keith Boyum
- Fund Development Chair: Renae Boyum
- Human Resources Chair: Dale Vaughan
- Technology Chair: -----

Film & Discussion: “The Occupation of the American Mind” Sunday, May 23, at 12:30 p.m.

You may have heard that Human Rights Watch released a report about apartheid and persecution in Palestine. Was this surprising or puzzling for you? If so, Advocates for Peace & Justice, in collaboration with the Diversity & Inclusion Ministry, are presenting an opportunity for you to have the situation explained. We are showing the film “The Occupation of the American Mind” to be followed by a discussion moderated by Lulu Hammad. Lulu is a Palestinian-American who was born and raised in Jordan and who received her education at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law. Links for your review -


Film trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9hpyHbLxbE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9hpyHbLxbE)

The event is scheduled for 12:30 on Sunday, May 23, and will be presented on Zoom. Plan to join in the discussion! We can all be better informed about the situation in Palestine/Israel that has presented so many challenges in international relations for over seventy years. Beyond that, we will have a greater appreciation of the conditions the Palestinian people have lived in for all these decades.

- Craig Repp

5/31 Terry LePage
5/10 Johannah Bullington 5/23 Christian Murdy
5/28 Jeffrey Gaskill 5/19 Cindy O’Dell
5/24 Sarah Gilliland 5/15 Dale Ramirez
5/23 Connie Jones 5/29 Mark Rychnovsky
5/07 Pam Kamps 5/26 Scott Rychnovsky
5/02 Nathaniel KeslerWest 5/05 Ron Steiner
5/25 Jeannie Lee
Troop 602 and Pack 697 News
by Matt Mirmak

Seven years ago, I had the fortunate opportunity to re-engage with Scouting in Orange County by helping start Troop 602 and serving as their Chartered Organization Representative. Due to the fact that our troop’s sponsor is a church in Irvine (Irvine UCC) that is well known for its progressive stances on social justice issues, it was presumed by some of our Scouting peers that Troop 602 was more of a “publicity stunt” than an actual Scout troop. Thanks to the hard work of wonderful leaders and volunteers like Ken Steinhart, Ron Steiner, Jeri Carey, Becky Roach, Ann Trinh, and Keith Bauer, Troop 602 helped dispel any doubt about Irvine UCC’s commitment to Scouting in Orange County. As a result, Irvine UCC ended up becoming the sponsor of Cub Scout Pack 697 and the meeting home of Tsungoni chapter of the Order of the Arrow and the Rancho San Joaquin District committee.

To watch my church and denomination (United Church of Christ) re-engage with Scouting and become a respected charter partner within our council has been a great joy to witness. I am honored to have been given an opportunity to serve Scouting in this capacity and to have witnessed the many positive changes in the culture of Scouting.

With that being said, I am officially announcing my resignation as the Chartered Organization Representative of Troop 602 and Pack 697 effective at the end of May. I have informed our church leadership about my intent to resign from this position, and felt it was only fair that I let the rest of you know about my desire to step down. During this time, our church leadership will be looking for a member of Irvine UCC to take over the role of Chartered Organization Representative for Troop 602 and Pack 697. The new person, whoever they may be, will be your new Scouting liaison for the church and all of the Scouting groups that meet on the Irvine UCC campus.

It has been a great joy and honor working with all of you in Scouting. I wish you nothing but the best in your future endeavors. Thank you for allowing me the honor and privilege to be of service with you in Scouting.

Yours in Scouting,
Matt Mirmak

IUCC Member Hikes for a Cause
by Scott Bollens

IUCC member Scott Bollens is starting May 6th on a planned 2,660-mile hiking trek of the Pacific Crest Trail (Mexico to Canada).

He would love to have the spiritual energy of IUCC members behind him for this six month journey. Just think, you can be with him spiritually without experiencing the aching blisters and joints, bad freeze-dried food, and dreadful nights sleeping on the ground!

If you are interesting in donating per mile, you can send a check to the church office or contribute online with Zelle.

Contribute 1¢/mile= $26 total
Contribute 2¢/mile= $52 total
Contribute 3¢/mile= $80 total
Contribute 5¢/mile= $133 total
Contribute 10¢/mile= $266 total

All donations will go to Rescue Mission of Tustin.

Josh Chandra, our accompanist, got married!

Josh Chandra, our wonderful accompanist, got married! He and his lovely bride Breana have created a website that includes a registry if you’d like to help the happy couple celebrate their love on this joyous occasion: https://www.theknot.com/us/breana-chin-and-joshua-chandra-apr-2021/registry
Teacher Appreciation Week at the IUCC Early Childhood Center!

Thanks and kudos to Sandy Sudweeks (who took these photos) and Linda Heath (shown in two photos below), members of the IUCC Child Care Committee, for decorating the preschool rooms to honor our hard-working teachers! Per Sandy, “Linda pulled out her fabulous teacher skills and her teacher supplies to make these terrific signs to surprise the staff.” We love our teachers, and we hope they feel honored and appreciated when they arrive at work on Monday morning!
My earliest memory of anything about race was a childhood ditty:

_Eeny, meeny, miny, mo. Catch a “n-word” by the toe. If he hollers let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, mo._

I learned this by rote and didn’t give the slightest thought to its meaning. Today I am horrified by it. Doesn’t this ditty teach - below consciousness - that the “n-word” is a lesser being, not worthy of dignity? I had no understanding that this was a belittlement of a human being. It taught me subliminally that, in contrast to the “n-word,” I, a little white girl, was in charge of him by having the power to let him go. Indeed, I was a benevolent person to do so.

I was born into a lower-middle-class family in Minneapolis, MN. Because I was white, I had advantages in my life, even though I didn’t come from wealth. I did nothing as a child to earn them, making them unearned privileges. My family could choose where they wanted to live. If they needed it, they could secure a bank loan for a car, house, or business. The schools I attended were well-funded and well-equipped. My mother and father brought me to a doctor at the slightest sign of illness where good healthcare was readily provided. The police were my protectors. I did nothing to earn these advantages; I was born into a society that provided them to white children. Contrarily, other children - often those of color - experienced unearned dis-advantages.

I never dreamed that my family finances might have been privileged. In those days, home ownership was a major way to have financial security. My father and his brothers built my parents’ first house, a modest three-rooms with outdoor toilet, in the outskirts of Minneapolis. The building supplies were purchased by a bank loan. When our family increased from three to five people, my parents decided to buy a larger home in Minneapolis. They sold their home, added their savings, and paid $12,000 cash for the new house. Cash! No one was suspicious of how they got that money. There were no whispers that they were shady people because “who has that much cash on hand?”

Father was a blue-collar worker, a factory laborer, with an eighth-grade education. Yet, our family was welcomed and accepted into that Minneapolis neighborhood of “starter” homes for white-collar workers, including two doctors and one pastor. Dad’s less prestigious job didn’t restrict us to a lesser neighborhood. Being able to live there resulted in our being perceived as financially responsible. Their moderate income, yet financial stability, meant that my parents were able to loan George and me half of the down-payment on our first house. Their advantage of home ownership and the financial benefits it brought aided us.

I never considered that my education was privileged. I attended a private Christian high school that was known for its scholastic excellence. The hands-on teachers, who believed in the value of each student, gave me a foundation of being a person of worth. Never did I hear, “You’re no good. You’re trash. You’re dumb.” The few people of color in our school were respected and viewed as “a credit to their race.” In other words, considered exceptional for their race.

I also learned about race from the missionaries supported by our church. The white missionaries were perceived as saints who obeyed God’s call to leave their comfortable homes and go to the dark continent of Africa. When the missionaries came home on furlough, I sat wide-eyed listening about their great love for the “poor lost souls in Africa.” We learned that African Black people were needy. We were the patriarchs/matriarchs who would bring them salvation. We would teach them our culture, our religion, and _how to be like us_. While the stories created empathy, there was an underlying feeling that we were fortunate that Africans lived far away and we didn’t have to interact with those backward folks. We thanked God for missionaries who would do that for us. It was a limited and untrue picture, never suggesting that the African Blacks were people of wisdom or that we could learn anything from their race and culture.

I don’t recall ever connecting African Blacks with the African Americans brought here as slaves, nor with the people of color in my own city. Being a former resident of Minneapolis where George Floyd was killed, I’m thankful to be past the “eeny, meeny, miny, mo” of my childhood, but I still have much to learn. (To be continued next month.)
For the past couple of months we’ve been having a discussion about the role of parents as “leaders.” Of course there is no need to be “led” if you’re not going anywhere. This month we’ll take a break from considering the “qualities” of positive parental leadership to talk about the journey. The journey under discussion may not be very long, but it’s very profound.

The journey we’ll consider this month is the one out of the house! This walk out the door seems important now as Orange County and California prepare to let us out of our houses and back into our communities, and back into lives that vaguely resemble our pre-pandemic routines. Of course it is clear that “things” will not be as they were and we’ll have to adjust to modifications being made, indicating that society is better, but not yet “well.” For many adults, work will be work, but not as it was. For kids, school will be school, but not as it was. Some social events will begin, but will not be as they were. (Carl and I are having trouble getting tickets to our usual seats at the ballpark.)

Not only will “things” be different; we will be different. No one will emerge from a year of illness, isolation, and disruption of all customary routines as they were before. This is probably more true for children than for adults, given that they didn’t have as many years to develop and “ground” themselves before everything was disrupted.

It is important that parents prepare themselves to deal with “different” children than they knew before the global health crisis. The children who walked in the door in March 2020 will not be the same children who walk out the door in May 2021. For their security and well-being, it is urgent that parents and any other adults who interact with them do not engage in any negative responses that “blame” children and teens for the changes we will see in their actions and reactions. We have to be the grown-ups and “say goodbye” to the children we knew and loved before, and learn to know and love the children we have now. These are children and young people who had a year of the lives they knew taken away, through no fault of their own. Nothing that has happened to them is their fault; but bad things have happened to them.

Much is being written these days about the toll the pandemic has taken on the young. I urge you to read as much as you can. If you have to study for a driving test, think of how urgent it is that we “study” for our parenting and professional responsibilities, anticipating the challenges we can expect. All professionals involved with children and youth are in complete agreement about the areas of concern, which are all the areas of children’s lives. The year inside the house away from their regular contacts and activities has profoundly impacted their social well-being, their emotional well-being, and their mental well-being. Prepare to help them in each of these parts of themselves as they bring their post-pandemic selves out into the world again.

Some children will have weathered the year better than others. How each child/teen emerges from the year of Covid will be the result of both external and internal factors. Those children who had someone important to them die or get very sick will carry extra burdens of grief. Those children interred with adults who are emotionally distant or emotionally cruel will carry scars of mistreatment. Those children cooped up in houses where depression, drunkenness or domestic violence was part of their every day life, with no ability to get out, will carry scars of trauma. Those children whose parents found “remote learning” unbearable and became short-tempered and behaved in ways that caused their children to think that they were the cause of the outbursts will find dramatic changes in their ease with you, and their enthusiasm with learning. Those parents whose partnerships became unhappy and tense have changed what “home” means. Next month we’ll talk about internal differences that affect how children cope.

Your homework is probably obvious: Please quietly and honestly reflect on the atmosphere that was created in your home over the past year – not to repent or self-criticize, but to acknowledge and prepare for your “new” sons and daughters. They will need you more than ever. We’ll talk again next month.
Mental prayer, as a way of maintaining close contact and communion with God, has its genesis in the conception of formulating a prayer in one’s mind and allowing that prayer from the mind to penetrate the heart with focused intent and genuine purpose. I believe that one can exercise a mental prayer by reciting the Prayer of Jesus or any other prayer (e.g., The Serenity Prayer, The Prayer of Saint Francis, one’s own made-up prayer) focusing on each word as the prayer is being mentally recited. This focus on each word in the Prayer of Jesus (or any other prayer), that is, “Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen” is likely to enter one’s mind if one completely submits and surrenders to the will of God or the will of something larger than oneself, i.e., nature or the universe.

Regarding the Prayer of Jesus, I concur with what Dorotheus, the Russian ascetic and spiritual writer said regarding God’s reception of one’s prayer. The Spirit of God attends to the mind and intention much more than to how many words one uses in their prayers. This view of Doretheus concerning God’s reception to one’s prayer is congruent with Brother Lawrence’s complete abandonment of any type of formalization or guidelines when it comes to the Divine act of communion with God through prayer.

Mental prayer can begin as Morning Prayer, allowing one to maintain close and continual uninterrupted contact with God. This continual communion with God cannot be accomplished overnight. Continual communion with God or practicing the presence of God, in my opinion, is likely to require years of training by practicing an adopted daily prayer ritual such as recitation of the Prayer of Jesus or any other type of prayer. In terms of my own spiritual journey, I now recognize the importance of prayer as a daily endeavor. Unfortunately, for many, such a daily endeavor is often neglected because of a number of reasons related to the demands of modern society. The Prayer of Jesus can be one vehicle that is likely to keep one focused on God’s presence because of its utter simplicity and because it does not require any form of formulaic process to achieve inner peace and oneness with God.

In light of the importance of daily prayer, I find the statement by Bonhoeffer (1970, p. 64) alluding to “…morning prayer determines the day” as the foundation for living each day in accordance with our own personal understanding of scriptures in terms of guidance in all personal, professional, and familial affairs. In terms of the concept of continuously praying without ceasing (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17), I also find the Psalms to provide numerous verses that yield motivation for daily mental prayer especially since the Psalter is the story of humanity through kingship via a Davidean perspective. This story of humanity through the Psalter causes me to reflect on the challenges and struggles of modern 21st Century society. In my analysis and thinking, I have found confirmation that today’s human struggles are not that much different from the struggles of the people of God during Biblical times. Concerns and dilemmas dealing with shame, guilt, temptation, courage, praise, thanksgiving, and lamentations still exist today.

I find that social and professional demands are likely to have a probable positive outcome with many of the social and professional variables we will encounter if and only if we take the time for Morning Prayer and mediation as a way to determine the day (Bonhoeffer).

Finally, prayer and meditation must be seen as the necessary nectar for living the words to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (cf. Micah 6:8) in our daily interactions with others whether in a personal, professional, or familial setting. For me personally, the Prayer of Jesus causes me to be grounded in the Spirit and experience the presence of the Divine. What is the prayer or words that cause you to be grounded in the Spirit? What words can you use to lead you to a point of being grounded and experience inner peace?

References


We see the quote from Micah 6:8 every time we walk into the sanctuary: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” A similar verse from Isaiah 1:17 commands us to “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

God requires us to act justly, and I think most of us here at IUCC try to achieve justice wherever we can. Justice seeks to repair harm and correct society’s inequities, to restore that which is fair and right to those who are disenfranchised. As Progressive Christians, it is part of our calling to be God’s voice in the world to advocate for peace and justice. We even have a ministry for that here at our church!

The word “justice” has been bandied about a lot over the last couple of weeks following a jury’s unanimous decision to find former police officer Derek Chauvin guilty of murdering George Floyd. My legal background tells me that to “bring a person to justice” means to try him before a court of his peers and administer punishment if he is found guilty of his misdeeds. That seems likely to occur when Chauvin is sentenced in a few weeks. But has broader “justice” been served?

While some measure of justice may have been served in this one case, it doesn’t mean we have put systemic injustice or police misconduct against people of color behind us. Far from it. Still, it’s a step in the right direction. Chauvin will be held accountable for his actions. A police officer will pay a price. Law enforcement officials testified against him, breaking the “blue wall of silence.” That’s an incredibly rare thing indeed. In the end, the facts were uncontroversial and much too egregious to be ignored. I hope that this case will serve as a catalyst that forces our leaders to reimagine policing in innovative new ways that replace the deeply flawed system we have now. Reform is long overdue.

Frederick Douglass said: “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.” He speaks the truth.

The jury’s decision is bittersweet. It’s hard to be fully celebratory, because there’s not much to celebrate. One man died horribly, and another will likely spend most of his life in prison. But I had hoped for a conviction, and I’m relieved that we got one. I’m relieved that the stress level has eased just a little bit for our brothers and sisters of color. They needed a win to break up the long string of losses - the fear that overtakes them with every traffic stop, every siren, and every altercation (whether they started it or not). This verdict was a much-needed breath of fresh air after a long period of feeling the oppressive knee of racism on their necks. I’ve heard people of color say, “I can exhale now,” and I get it. I think a lot of people who watched the video get it now too.

It took a lot of people to make this verdict happen. I am grateful to the members of the jury, who showed courage and empathy in their decision-making. I am grateful to the judge, who was fair and even-handed throughout the trial. I am even grateful to the police officials who testified against Chauvin. And I applaud the bravery of the little girl who taped the whole sad event, making sure the world could see what she saw. Seeing is believing, after all.

This verdict isn’t going to end racism. No, we have a long, long way to go before that’s within reach. But it’s a big step towards accountability. And there will be more big steps in the years ahead as more people become aware. I saw a great meme on Facebook that said it very well: “This is not justice. This is accountability. Chauvin is where we start. The whole world is next.” It seems to me that although one case of accountability may not achieve systemic justice, perhaps a hundred cases - or a thousand - will achieve it. It’s already begun.

There’s still a lot of work to do. But this one verdict - this landmark decision - is huge. So many of us prayed it would happen, but we weren’t sure it would. God worked through a lot of people to jump start the train of justice, and now it’s on the tracks and headed for the station.

What we need to do now is stand in solidarity with our friends of color - to step outside our privileged bubbles and see the world through their eyes, even for a moment, so we can have empathy and keep the momentum going.

As Ben Crump, the Floyd family attorney said, “Justice for Black America is justice for all America.” Let justice ring out loud and clear, and let us truly become “One nation under God with liberty and justice for all.” Amen.
On March 23rd, I went to a candlelight prayer vigil in Garden Grove to pay tribute to the victims of the Atlanta shootings where six Asian women were the victims of a gun-related hate crime. Although the Atlanta Police Department did not officially classify these murders as a hate crime, it was apparent that the twenty-something white gunman fetishized these Korean and Chinese women as objects to satisfy his sexual desires, which he saw as enabling evil. As I sat in my chair offering my prayers to the deceased, clutching a handmade lantern and listening to the chants of a Buddhist monk, I was approached by a reporter from KNBC 4 Los Angeles.

“Hi, can we speak with you?”
“Sure, what would you like to talk about?”
“Your experience with anti-Asian racism.”
“How much time do you have?”

For those of you wondering why the reporter wanted to interview me about anti-Asian racism, let me qualify myself before you make any rash assumptions. I am biracial Asian American. My dad is white and my mother is from Thailand. Both of them had met during the Vietnam War in 1967 when my dad was stationed in the US Air Force at U Tapao AB in the city of Sattahip, Thailand. My dad was a Captain and a B-52 pilot and my mother worked as a cook at a massage parlor that catered to US service personnel. Eventually, they got married by the equivalent of a justice of the peace in Sattahip and started a family in the United States. In 1969, I was born in Pennsylvania. I am one of many children that were born as the result of relationships between US service personnel and SE Asian women from Thailand and Vietnam during the Vietnam War. In essence, I am a product of US military intervention in Vietnam.

I still have to navigate myself in a white dominated society even though I grew up a biracial household. Even though I was born and have lived in the United States most of my life, with the exception of two years in Thailand when I was 1-2 years old, I feel that I have constantly to prove that I am American enough for other people. I get constant questions from white people like “Where are you from?” When I responded “Lancaster, PA” or “Philadelphia,” the response from white people would be “No, where are you really from?” Which begs the question - was the answer of Pennsylvania not sufficient enough for you? And why do you really need to know where I am really from? It is up to me to decide if I feel comfortable enough to share that personal information with another person.

You would think that I have accomplished enough in my life to qualify as an American. In addition to being born in Pennsylvania, I grew up in an Air Force family where we moved a lot. I played sports like baseball, football, and wrestling. I played college football. I was in the Boy Scouts and achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. I watch Major League Baseball and the NFL and cheer for the Philadelphia Phillies and Philadelphia Eagles. And despite all of this on the surface, I am seen by some as not American enough. Why? Because of my background as a biracial Thai American, I am still seen and treated as a foreigner in a country that I have lived in almost my entire life.

When the killings in Atlanta happened, some well-meaning white people said to me, “I can’t believe this happened. We should be better than this. It’s the fault of the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his enablers.” While I agree that the rhetoric of the Trump presidency regarding COVID-19 contributed to the increased attacks on people in my community, anti-Asian racism and the “othering” of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans has been going on since the Chinese came to this country to look for gold in the 1850s. This isn’t a new development and not that shocking to me. This tragedy is another constant reminder where white people and white supremacy tell people who look like me that we really do not belong in America and that we are perpetual foreigners. Asian people have been on the receiving end of attacks since the Chinese immigrated here in the 1850s. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is the only legislation that was passed by Congress that sought to prohibit a certain ethnic group from coming into this country. We can certainly talk about how American citizens of Japanese descent were ripped from their homes and put into internment camps complete with armed guards and barbed wire only because they “looked like the enemy” during World War II. Or how a number of white people decided to storm into a Chinese enclave in San Francisco in the 19th century and lynch a number of Chinese people. If you use Google and type in the history of anti-Asian racism, you can find a number of incidents that happened to Asian people in this country long before Donald Trump and his enabling supporters called COVID-19 “China virus.” You will see that racially motivated acts committed towards people of Asian descent are as much a part of the American fabric as apple pie. While you may express shock and dismay at these racist actions, I say to you “welcome to my world and reality.” This is stuff I
continue to experience living as an Asian American in the United States.

So why have some of us Asians stayed quiet through a lot of these horrific acts of racism? Perhaps it is because some of us have been conditioned by our elders to “keep your head low and not cause trouble.” These are the exact words that my mother told me as I would go off to school and when I eventually left home. As long as you didn’t make a scene and worked hard, you would be rewarded for your good behavior by the dominant culture. In addition to the language barriers when it comes to reporting hate crimes, a good percentage of hate crimes do not get reported by the Asian community because some of us don’t want to bring attention upon ourselves and cause trouble for ourselves and other people. Unfortunately, it is this approach of not wanting to cause trouble that inspired a New York Times writer in 1966 to bestow the label of “model minority” to Asian Americans. The “model minority” narrative states that Asians have been able to succeed in this country despite their experiences with violent racism.

While there are a number of Asian ethnic groups that are doing well economically, the “model minority” narrative does not take into account that there are a lack of CEOs of Asian descent in most major corporations and that there are a number of Asian ethnic groups that are not economically well off. For example, there is a significant amount of poverty in Southeast Asian communities (Hmong, Filipino, Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Thai) that the “model minority” narrative does not take into account. In addition to the economic wealth disparities, the “model minority” narrative was a way for white Americans to state to other non-white groups (black, Latinx, and indigenous) that racism can be overcome with hard work and self-reliance. Unfortunately, hard work and self-reliance did not prevent Vincent Chin from being murdered in 1982 and the six Asian women who were gunned down in Atlanta back in March.

I have seen a number of questions from white people after the Atlanta shootings asking “How I can I be a better ally to Asian people?” I could make a few suggestions if you don’t mind listening to some uncomfortable truths. Maybe listen when some of us tell you about a micro-aggression that you committed. I don’t know if I have enough hands to count the number of times I have called out someone for saying something offensive or grossly inaccurate about Asians. The usual reaction is the person defends themself by either telling me about their extensive civil rights activism resume, their last three week trip to Asia, or about the number of Asian friends that they have in their inner circle.

Another way you can be supportive is when an Asian person like myself is discussing their experience with racism, don’t play devil’s advocate or say “Are you sure that was racist?” Please do not talk over us. This is not your opportunity to use our racial trauma as your own debating exercise. I do not have enough fingers to count the number of times I have been asked that question and ended up being gaslit by a white person. And it’s not just people who are on the conservative side that engage in this kind of behavior. In fact, I’ve experienced a lot more of these reactions from people who identify as progressive and thought they were well meaning in their intentions. While you may think your intentions are good, the impact of your actions can cause greater harm. When a person of color is telling you that your actions are being hurtful or causing harm, please come to a full stop and don’t react.

In closing, what I told the reporter from KNBC Channel 4 is that I am tired and exhausted. I am tired of having to explain to white people about the racism that my fellow Asians and I experience as we try to navigate through predominantly white circles. I am tired of having to dispel the narrative of Asians being the “model minority.” I am tired of seeing our elders and our women being hunted by white people like animals and fetishized. I am tired of the hurtful stereotypical jokes that my mother was a prostitute because she is Thai and married a member of the US military during the Vietnam War. I am tired of being tone policed by thin skinned white people who DO NOT LISTEN and make excuses for their casual racism or the casual racism of their white peers. We Asians are more than people who cook good food for your pleasure and enjoyment. We are more than service sector employees that work in nail salons and massage parlors. We are human. We are your neighbors. And yes, we are as American as you are.

If you think talking about racism, white privilege, and white supremacy is tiresome, think about how tiring it is for those of us who are people of color trying to navigate around it on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the burden of pointing out racial micro-aggressions and hurtful actions falls on the shoulders of people of color. To see white people express sorrow but not do anything to correct these wrongs that have been pointed out is frustrating. Don’t tell me how sorry you are. Don’t tell me how things like this infuriate you. Take action and use your privilege to do better, white people.
Learning to be a White Interracial Ally
(This article is dedicated to Joy)
Reverend Dr. Jerry von Talge

Being an interracial ally is multifaceted in terms of complexity, strategies, emotional experience and a steep learning curve. If you desire to avoid pain, then don’t undertake this endeavor, because you will have painful experiences. The pain will cause you to learn a great deal about race in America, as well as about yourself.

I have been granted an exceptional opportunity - to participate in an Asian and Ally support group that meets weekly. I recently joined our Diversity and Inclusion Ministry, which has helped motivate me to become an interracial ally.

My first experience as a White ally was on Saturday, March 27th, 2021. I attended an anti-Asian hate rally at Irvine Civic Center and befriended Joy, a 16-year-old Korean woman.

She attends high school in Irvine. We experienced an immediate, positive connection, which continued to develop over two and a half hours of sharing at the rally. Between Joy and me were extreme differences: in age (I am 86), ethnicity (I am White), religious orientation (she does not particularly believe in God, I am an ordained minister), education (she has not graduated from high school, I have a PhD in clinical psychology), and gender. We formed a relationship between two equals with no vertical paternalism. In a whole lifetime, we have few encounters like this.

Near the end of the rally, I took the plunge and decided to speak to the 200 people present. I had no idea what I was going to say but found myself saying “I am Jerry von Talge. I am here to learn and to be an ally.” After saying this, I received heartwarming applause. Four people came up after the rally and thanked me for attending. Then, a Chinese American woman, who has started an Asian American and Ally support group, came up to speak to me. She invited me to participate in her support group. I was indeed excited!

I have attended three sessions of the support groups. I ran into a problem in the third session because of a mistake on my part. I have been the only White person at the support group sessions, and at the beginning of the third session I was feeling some discomfort about being the only White person. I made the mistake of saying that I was the “token White.” There was immediate blowback, especially on the part of one of the women, who had a strong criticism. I realized later that I was making it all about me whereas it should have been about them. Clearly, I have a great responsibility towards the members of the group -- everything I say and do is potentially impactful because I am a privileged White male.

Many Asians feel invisible or that they are only valued in a utilitarian sense and not for who they are as a person. Many feel like they are not accepted as legitimate residents of the United States - they feel like permanent foreigners who don’t belong here. They have these beliefs and the resulting pain because of White speech and behavior.

Another important dimension is gender. My Asian and Allies support group consists of twice as many women as men. I am not only dealing with all the complexities of race but also the complexities of gender. Historically and currently, discrimination devalues women in terms of what they have to say and what they have to offer. They’re supposed to take a back seat and let men drive. I must be careful not to dominate the women in the support group because of overeager enthusiasm.

I will sometimes be the recipient of implicit bias and its derivative, micro-aggression, from the members in the group. There is no way to have this kind of group without pain for both the Asian members and for me. Healing can come from facing and working through this pain. The prospect of healing is both exciting and hope-producing.

Being in this Asian and Ally support group will be a fascinating journey. The diversity I am encountering is enriching my life beyond measure.
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