Our Leadership Retreat on July 24 was full of positive energy!

Admin Board members (L to R): Anne Rosse, Mark Allen, Renae Boyum, Daniel Blackburn, Tricia Aynes, Jon Ingal, Chuck Heath, & Keith Boyum

Pastor Sarah with our facilitator Dr. Cedrick Bridgeforth

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Felicity Figueroa

Jon Ingal, Craig Tyrl, and Alyssa Cornett

Everyone was engaged and interested

Ministries Board members (L to R seated): Jenna Wadsworth-McCarty, Felicity Figueroa, Kathi Smith, Lauren Louie, Sharon Lynn, & Alyssa Cornett

(L to R standing): Craig Repp, Alex Ingal, Craig Tyrl, Pat Sauter, Lesli Mitchell, Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, Diane Rust, & Jeanne Maag
We celebrated Christmas on July 25th!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Pastor Sarah
From the Pastor

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

“We need a little Christmas, right this very moment!”

No matter that we’re right smack in the middle of summer, we need a little Christmas... so we got a little Christmas!

Yes, we’re midway through a summer series called, “The Gospel Truth: Whose Good News is it?” And this series invites us to get to know the gospels a little better as we learn to distinguish the characteristics of each gospel, along with their histories, themes, and communities. And two out of the seven gospels we’re looking at have unique birth stories. Only most of us can’t distinguish those stories from one another. So it only seems right, particularly after the year plus that we’ve had, that we get an extra dose of Christmas. We ended the month with Christmas in July as we explored the Gospel of Matthew and we’ll start the month of August holding onto the Christmas Spirit as we dive into the Gospel of Luke, exploring its birth narrative and other defining features. So if you missed out on our Christmas celebration in July, you get a second chance as we begin the first Sunday of August as we head back to the manger and meet up with the little baby Jesus and the angels who heralded his birth.

The more I think about it, the more there is merit to observing Jesus’ birth outside of what has become a very commercialized Christmas season that starts about Halloween and goes for 2 months (or more). While family gatherings are more cherished than ever, we tend to miss the “reason for the season” because we have found other reasons more pressing. Celebrating Christmas at a different time offers us the opportunity to reflect on the stories we find in Matthew and Luke and consider what the significance of Jesus’ birth narratives can have as we interpret his life and its relationship with ours.

The Gospel of Matthew sees Jesus as the Jewish Messiah linking him to the Israelite past. The idea that Jesus’ birth is the birth of Emmanuel: “God with us” is powerful. As we’ve processed this nearly year and a half of living in a pandemic, many have asked, “Where is God in all this?” and we’ve seen some answers that may be troubling. And yet, I find it incredibly comforting and even empowering to embrace the idea that though God might not be superman, God is with us, working in us and through us, holding us through all the pain, sickness, illness and death.

We will begin the month as the series continues, we’ll linger a little longer in Christmas. Luke’s gospel tells the story of a Jesus who isn’t for the Jewish community alone, but a savior for the whole world with a focus on the outcasts of the society. Luke tells us the story of Jesus born not to kings, but a baby born into poverty, to parents no one had ever heard of, and no one cared to even make room for --and the news of this baby’s birth was shared first to dirty shepherds who were the only people who even noticed. Luke’s Jesus has a special affinity for the impoverished and the powerless and it is demonstrated right in this first story of his birth.

So as we spend the summer getting to know Jesus better, by getting to know our gospels better, I think we may even gain an appreciation for Christmas that can only come by our willingness to hear with new ears because we’re not doing it “the same old way.” Rather, we’re liberated from tradition by a few months, so that we can better understand our traditions, our scripture, our Jesus.

So let’s begin August with as much joy as we end July! With a Christmas tree in our sanctuary, a story of Jesus on our lips, and a song of joy in our hearts! Then it’s on to the Gospel of John to wrap up our canonical gospels, paving the way to break out of our Bible to explore the Gospels that didn’t make the cut!

There’s a lot of Good News here at IUCC, open the pages and dive right in! But most importantly -- let’s share the good news as we live it together!

Your Pastor,

Sarah
From the Administrative Pastor
by the Rev. Steve Swope

Slowly but surely, we’re reclaiming our facilities at IUCC and putting them back to work! Of course, our preschool has been active for over a year, after its 3½ month shut-down. But we’ve been worshipping weekly for over a month, and we’ve got groups coming back on site.

Thank you to all who have continued to contribute to IUCC during this time! You may not have been able to be here, but our buildings have stayed clean and in good repair because you supported your church. That foundation of support – not just in the past year but for many – has made the facilities-management part of my job much easier.

And you have responded positively to adult education and fellowship on Zoom, too, which has made my adult-education side happy. Think of all we’ve done online:

- 2 major guest speakers and several others,
- 2 weekly Bible studies,
- numerous book studies,
- Comma Groups,
- women’s fellowship groups.

Now we’re (mostly) back on site, in person. But we’ll continue to keep a few Zoom options open, so everyone can feel comfortable and safe participating. So join in Tuesday Bible Study each week at 4:00 p.m. – here at IUCC and on Zoom. My Wednesday review of the story in the Hebrew scriptures is still on Zoom, heading towards completion this month. And Diversity & Inclusion will be starting a new 7-week book study at the end of this month.

We’re working on a guest-speaker idea or two for this fall – in person! And Comma Groups will be starting up before you know it. We’re expecting that all our groups will be able to meet in person, but we’re planning to offer one Zoom-based group, too.

How can you get involved in Comma Groups, IUCC’s small-groups program? I’m glad you asked! Sign-up information will go out later this month. But the most important need right now is for Leaders! Two people have already committed, but more are needed; we can only have as many groups as we have leaders, and in-person groups work so much better when they’re limited to about 8 people. Have YOU been involved in Comma Groups in the past? Are you willing to consider being a Comma Group Leader this year? Contact me right away, please!

Strategic Planning Task Force
Now Forming!

What is the future for IUCC? How can we plan ahead to ensure that our mission and vision come to fruition? How can we revitalize our beloved church so we continue to meet the needs of our members while reaching out into the wider community to attract new ones?

On July 7, an ad-hoc planning committee met to discuss how to implement two initiatives established by the Admin Board: a Strategic Planning Task Force and a smaller group that will explore possible partnerships with one or more local UCC churches. We agreed that the Strategic Planning Task Force will formally launch on September 1, 2021, and extend up to six months.

Membership is open to anyone in the congregation! If you have the time, interest, and skills to be a part of this very worthwhile effort to envision the future of IUCC, we would love to hear from you! To indicate your interest, please go to https://www.iucc.org/strategic-planning-task-force-interest/ and fill out the required information. You may submit the form anytime between August 1 and August 16. It is short and easy to fill out online. It will ask you to provide your contact information and say why you are interested and what skills you bring to the table.

The final Strategic Planning Task Force will consist of 6-10 members, chosen to be representative of the various demographics, ethnicities, and stakeholders of our congregation. Its meetings will be held on a regular basis, possibly weekly. We will consult with church groups and review the Church Profile and other materials to create a living document that will guide us through the next few years. Please consider filling out the Information Form!

The smaller exploratory partnership group will look into possible partnerships with one or more local UCC churches to begin the process of relationship-building to see how we might share resources to achieve our vision of bringing Progressive Christianity to the wider Orange County community.

We’re excited about the possibilities and look forward to the new adventures and opportunities ahead!

Tricia Aynes, Moderator
Before the pandemic – lots of stories will be introduced that way now – before the pandemic, our weekly worship services took a fairly standard form:

- Worship Leader with introduction & announcements
- Opening with singing & congregational participation
- Choir anthem, scripture reading, & children's time
- Quiet time for reflection, including prayer requests, & offering
- Sermon from the Pastor & closing song

There was also a good bit of informality, and some things you could usually expect – a song from Lester Ricks, for instance, or someone losing their place in a handful of papers, or announcements that went a little too long. It was familiar and friendly and felt like home.

During the pandemic, we changed our worship service to meet the needs of an online audience – our only audience for 15 long months. We wanted to imitate the best examples of video programming, religious or not. So the service shifted to:

- Welcome from the Pastor
- Call to Worship by a Worship Leader, with read-at-home parts
- Hymn by our Music Director, with words included so folks at home could sing along
- Prayers & invitation to give online by the Pastor
- Anthem or Solo, then scripture reading by the Worship Leader
- Sermon & Benediction by the Pastor

Now that we’re worshipping in person again, why hasn’t worship gone back to the old, familiar pattern? For several reasons: First, we’re still serving an online community – some of our own folks, people far and near who have found us since the pandemic began, and those looking for a church. So our in-person worship must do double-duty, in our sanctuary and online.

Second, during the past year-plus, we have learned the value of “quality production” for newcomers and long-timers alike. Some things that were comfortable to us may be distracting or confusing to newcomers; some things just don’t work online.

For example, waiting while someone stands up and walks to the pulpit is called “dead time” in media; it communicates that we’re not prepared and we don’t know what we’re doing. On the other hand, quietly-spoken prayer requests from the pews can’t be heard online and would confuse those watching who only see a room of people sitting still.

Is our Pastor “playing more parts” in the service than before? Yes, but online viewers expect to see her; they don’t know who those other people are. Are we eager to sing again and be more involved in worship? Great! We’re still working out all the details of this new style and technology, and trying to do it in a way that is safe for everyone and environmentally responsible, too.

Lots of articles have noted that, after the pandemic, many things will be different. Our worship service has to be one of those things – and we’re trying to find the right balance so that our worship is, most of all, faithful and inspiring to all who share it. Please continue to be patient, as well as present.
We had the most wonderful Leadership Retreat on Saturday, July 24! Twenty-four members of the Admin and Ministries Boards met in Plumer Hall for an energetic discussion led by Dr. Cedrick Bridgeforth, a well-respected coach, consultant, strategist, educator, Methodist pastor, and author of 20/20 Leadership Lessons – Seeing Visions and Focusing on Reality.

Cedrick suggested we put aside old ways of doing things and consider new ones, saying “Church as you knew it is no longer there. That possibility doesn’t exist and cannot happen. Your mindset has been affected so deeply by the pandemic that it makes it impossible. The sooner you accept that reality, the better off you’ll be. You won’t waste the energy trying to make things the same as before. Acknowledge that things will be different.”

He encouraged us to “be open to new possibilities – things we never imagined before the pandemic. That also means there are some practices, behaviors, and customs that will no longer serve our needs and efforts.” We chatted in small groups of 3-5 to brainstorm responses to important questions, with the following results:

**As a church, what can we leave behind?**
- Old way of doing things/old expectations
- Church services that follow the same format
- Thick bulletins that waste paper
- Avoidance of confrontation and the pretense of peace
- Conformity based on the projected perception of what’s desired and needed
- Gatherings that are in-person only (replace some with Zoom and interpersonal events)
- Fear of the future
- Willingness to be ignorant

**What will we bring ahead?**
- Use technology and social media
- Innovative ways of thinking
- Outreach opportunities
- Lead with our ideals, not just come to services
- Growing awareness of white privilege
- Opportunities to be physically together in ways that really matter

**What will we create?**
- A greater variety of ways for people to engage, including more opportunities to get together and get to know each other
- Inclusive/interfaith services
- New activities and events
- Small group virtual activities
- Create a new format for worship services that include the Arts
- Make sure our programming is attractive to others so it includes the values of our church and is appealing to young families
- Create a community that provides a place of home, welcome, and a sense of security and belonging and acceptance – a sense of magic, exhilaration and wonder – a place where we can step into glory
- Refresh the ranks of leadership in the congregation to accommodate people with lower levels of commitment to encourage greater involvement
- Reinvigorate our commitment to the LGBT+ community
- Reinvigorate our music ministry to bring outreach to congregational growth, specifically to people of color and young families
- Reimagine and rethink our Child Care Center
- More outward focus to the wider community – specifically through our IT ministry, using tech savvy to bring us forward to this century
- Participate in more diverse activities and events
- Regularly mix things up so things don’t stagnate
- More flexibility in how we do things and make decisions

Sound intriguing? It was! I’m feeling energized and excited about IUCC’s future. I hope you are too. Please read about the upcoming Strategic Planning Task Force on page 4 and consider filling out an Interest Form!

In hope and optimism,

**Tricia**
Pastoral Relations Committee
Members Chosen

Connie Jones  
Chuck Heath  
Roni Portillo

Pastor Sarah and Moderator Tricia have jointly requested these three members to serve on the Pastoral Relations Committee. Per our Bylaws, they “shall be a personal support group to the pastor and shall serve as a confidential communication link between her and the congregation.” They are to “make their membership known to the congregation and invite members to express themselves with respect to the pastoral leadership.”

The Pastoral Relations Committee will meet at least quarterly with Pastor Sarah to provide a forum for conscious and constructive two-way communication and to review any concerns of the congregation or the pastor. Members of the congregation may feel free to contact any of them with concerns to be shared with Pastor Sarah.

IN SEARCH OF HOUSING

Our dear IUCC family member Lester Ricks and his two small dogs Eva and Zsa Zsa are currently looking for a room to rent, preferably in the Irvine-Tustin area. If you have anything available or know of someone who might, please contact the church office or Rev. Sarah directly at 949-733-0220 or pastorsarah@iucc.org. Thanks so much in advance for any help you can give!

Save the Date! AIDS Walk OC is coming September 18!

AIDS Walk OC is back and in person this year! Please join TEAM IUCC Walk the Walkers for a morning of fun and fundraising at Irvine’s own Bill Barber Memorial Park. Our walk will include a “Fun Walk” around the park, games, live entertainment, a “Cutest Dog” contest and more. Registration is $25 and it includes an exclusive 35th Annual AIDS Walk Orange County t-shirt. Sign up today with Team IUCC and/or make a donation on our team page at: https://donate.radianhealthcenters.org/event/aids-walk-orange-county-2021/e347040. Let’s all do our part to help our community members with HIV and their families thrive! For more information, contact Felicity Figueroa at felicitynf@aol.com.
You are invited to celebrate Vivian’s book

Love in a Time of Crisis
Vivian Elaine Johnson

Join us on

Sunday,
September 19th

Books are available following both worship services

Special prices are available at this event

Vivian Elaine Johnson is a beloved member of IUCC and a longtime contributor to this newsletter. Her articles have documented the ups and downs of a caregiver’s journey with grace, wit, and thoughtful reflection. We are so delighted that her beautiful prose is being published in this special book so all may enjoy its wisdom!

--Tricia Aynes, IUCC Newsletter Editor

Testimonials:

“Vivian’s book is not only a wonderful guide for those in challenging times but a treasure of wisdom for all who open its pages and their hearts.”
—Dave Ellingson, adventurer, author, and speaker

“What a treasure this book is. With insight and stunning transparency, Vivian carries us into the depth of hardship and back into the light of tender possibilities. By generously sharing her love, strength, and courage, she inspires readers to find their own.”
—Corby Beahm, MS, RN

“This lovely book should be required reading for my nursing colleagues as it will give them insight into the challenges of caring not only for the patient but also for the family.”
—Janet Emery, retired RN, MSN, Family Nurse Practitioner

Photos from Seekers Luncheon on July 20

It was a great turnout as 15 IUCC ladies got together for lunch in Laguna Woods. A good time was had by all!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes

Vivian Johnson was off to a great start signing copies of her new book at the Seekers luncheon.
Our first food and culture outing was a hit and enjoyed by the over twenty people who joined together at the Hen House Grill for delicious Persian food. The restaurant supervisor, Mehrdad (Michael) gave us a very interesting story of his life experience in Iran, England, and the US. The Q&A covered many food-related things like halal and sumac. Afterward, many in the party sidled over to the nearby Saffron & Rose ice cream shop. This also gave us a further opportunity to visit and get to know each other better.

What’s next, you ask? Well....

You are invited for a delicious lunch of Venezuelan food with interesting input from the proprietress on the food, the culture, and her experience as an immigrant to the US. Please check your calendar and plan to join us!

Mil Jugos
320 W 5th St, Santa Ana, CA 92701
Saturday, August 7 at 1:00 PM

Please let Craig Repp know if you can make it so that we can give Norah a good estimate of how many guests to expect.
craigrepp@gmail.com 949-463-0331
MEMBERSHIP MINISTRY
invites you to an IUCC potluck and “Symphony in the Cities” concert
Sunday, August 15
5:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Life is returning to normal and we are overjoyed to revive an IUCC summer tradition. Enjoy a free Pacific Symphony concert while having social time and fun with your IUCC friends.

Join us at Mike Ward Community Park, Woodbridge (just 2 blocks north of IUCC), with your low-back beach chair; hat, cap, or visor; a side dish or dessert to share, your cutlery and plates, and beverage of your choice. Chicken will be provided by the Membership Ministry.

With a potpourri of popular classics, pop tunes and patriotic tunes, the concert is led by Music Director Carl St. Clair and the audience is invited to participate in a sing-along of patriotic favorites.

Family activities and local music acts begin at 5:30 p.m. Arrive between 5 & 5:30 pm. The concert starts at 7:00 pm. Look for our IUCC area close to the stage. We will have two red balloons tied to a beach chair, red tablecloths on the ground, and IUCC signs in the grass.

Please sign up by emailing tommiek@cox.net and advise your potluck dish or dessert. We will want/need to know how much space to reserve.

For more information, music program and children’s activities, go to https://www.pacificsymphony.org/education/community_concerts

Hospitality NEEDS You!

Happy August, IUCC congregation! Most of you are probably aware by now that IUCC is cautiously moving towards being fully open for in person service. I know many of you have already participated in an in-person service and probably have wondered “Where is the Coffee???” Well... safety. Currently, hospitality doesn’t have permission to serve in-person amenities, even to the vaccinated. Why? Breakthrough infections! No vaccine is perfect. If you have ever gotten the flu vaccine and still caught the flu, well you had a breakthrough infection. The delta variant is causing problems in the United States and now there is a gamma variant starting to populate around the world. For your safety, IUCC just doesn’t feel it is appropriate to encourage congregating in one area, touching the same products.

Now that you know why there is no coffee yet, you must be wondering, “Soooo...why does hospitality need me?” That is a good question! We need you in the future so we are asking now. Hopefully, it will be safe enough in the near future for coffee hour to return in person and we will need help. COVID-19 resulted in the Hospitality team shrinking down to just one person, me. While I have the ability to solo run coffee hour until the end of time, it really isn’t ideal. If YOU would be interested in helping with coffee hour in the future, please let me know. In the past we had people cleaning up once a month and we were working on setting up for people to make coffee once a month too. Emailing me your interest in assisting is not an obligation in any way. I just want to know who is interested and what you might be interested in assisting with!

Do you want to assist, but not in person (busy schedule or otherwise)? We could also use your opinion! Coffee hour can come back the same as before or reimagined! I personally can’t stand coffee, so there will be no reimagining from me. Please email me ideas you have for coffee hour when it comes back and/or email me your concerns with coffee hour coming back. You may even see your feedback implemented! Please contact me at jalexingaliucc@gmail.com (alternative contact methods can be found in the directory).

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” 1 Peter 4:9

J. Alex Ingal (he, him, his)
Hospitality Chair
Good News for Racial Justice Advocates!
Good news! We advocates have a new and powerful strategy: speaking up about money lost because of structural racism*. Good news! Racial justice advocates have new powerful economist allies in Wall Street and top U.S. banks. For example, Citibank publicized that the U.S. has lost $16 trillion in gross national product by holding back the economic advancement of African Americans (https://www.citivelocity.com/citigps/closing-the-racial-inequality-gaps/). This money would have contributed to the well-being of ALL of us, Whites included.

We need to add economic losses and gains as a new form of persuasion for racial justice. Money is powerfully motivating. A good part of White supremacy and White privilege is related to the power of money. Our society began with a foundational structure that advanced and protected the economic advantage of the White patriarchy. Data on money can now be used to combat racism.

Jerry learned the power of money to mitigate racism in 1964 when he participated in an economic boycott of the Bon Marche, one of Seattle’s leading department stores. The store hired Blacks only for janitorial work and not for sales positions. Racial advocates asked customers to cut their Bon Marche credit cards in half and mail them to the department store. This strategy was effective. The Bon Marche set up a sales training program and hired blacks as salespersons.

Why have economic disparities worsened since the 1980s?
According to some political analysts (e.g., A. Lohrey, R.E. Goodin, D. Greenberg, I. Haney Lopez), some of our leaders have used hidden racist code words to divide us. One political advisor explained how to imply the n-word without saying it: “You say stuff like...forced busing, states’ rights…”. For example, the stereotypical welfare recipient is Black, so politicians can motivate Whites to vote against welfare just by disparaging welfare recipients. Code words are words like welfare queen, inner city crime, America First. They can elicit racial disgust in Whites so that most Whites vote against social programs, even though they would help many more Whites than Blacks. So, Whites vote against taxes on the wealthy that would support programs for their own good. Result: the 1% benefit.

What are the results today?
In terms of their median net worth, White households are about 13 times as wealthy as Black households – a gap that has grown wider since the Great Recession.

- The median yearly family income for Whites is $76,000 compared to $46,000 for Black families.
- Median wages at $19 per hour are higher for White workers with only a high school diploma than for Black workers with an Associate’s degree, $18 per hour.
- Among those with a bachelor’s degree, Blacks earn

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By Professor Lynn Carpenter & The Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge, Members, Diversity & Inclusion Ministry
$82,300 per year compared with $106,600 per year for Whites.

- Blacks on average are at least twice as likely as whites to be poor or to be unemployed.

**The Call from Wall Street and Other Economists for Racial Justice**

Wall Street is one of the last places a person would expect a call for racial justice. Former Wall Street economist, Dana Peterson, a black woman, is making a clarion call for racial economic equality for the prosperity of our nation. She led a research team at Citigroup that analyzed economic data on the high cost of structural racism: an economic loss of $16 trillion in GDP over the last 20 years. Here is a breakdown of this economic cost, looking at four key racial gaps between Blacks and Whites:

- $13 trillion lost in potential business revenue because of discriminatory lending to African American entrepreneurs, with an estimated 6.1 million jobs not generated as a result
- $2.7 trillion in income lost—and therefore lost consumption of goods-- because of disparities in wages suffered by African Americans
- $218 billion lost over the past two decades because of discrimination in providing housing credit
- And $90-113 billion in lifetime income lost from discrimination in access to higher education

The above figures would be helpful in any discussion about policy changes and/or reparations necessary to close such huge gaps. NOTE: These figures do not even include racial injustice against other persons of color.

**The Future**

The research institute McKinsey & Co. report that the racial wealth gap, if unchanged, will cost the US economy $1-1.5 trillion in GDP output each year into the future. The past year has shown some indicators that institutions may be responding to this economic drag. One example is JP Morgan Chase, which pledged $30 billion to help close the U.S. racial wealth gap, most going to housing. This February Chase also doubled their homebuyer grants to help minorities with down payments and closing costs.

It is still too early to know whether most institutions will follow through with their pledges.

**Let us continue to promote a moral imperative.**

**Let us add an economic imperative.**
My first encounter with the mystery woman was preceded by the glimpse of a flowing wrap-around dress and dainty sandaled feet, plus a whiff of nose-pleasing unidentifiable spicy aromas coming from her apartment. Who was she? I was intrigued and hoped to make her acquaintance.

It happened serendipitously a few days later when she unexpectedly stood at my door. In an accented voice, she explained that she was locked out of her apartment and needed refuge until her husband returned. It was January in snow-and-ice-wrapped Minnesota. The mystery woman stood before me with no boots or coat, only her sandals and a thin sweater over her sari.

As she thawed in the embrace of my apartment, I learned that Prema was from Alahabad, India. Her husband, John, a professor of plant pathology in India, was studying at the University of Minnesota. John, Prema, and their son, Depak, lived in university housing as did we. In fact, we shared a Quonset hut provided by the university, a thin wall separating our two units.

That cold day was the genesis of a wonderfully warm friendship. My first project was to find Prema some suitable winter clothing. Once that was accomplished, we began sharing an occasional dinner. I found that I loved the multiple flavors of her food; my own seemed rather bland in contrast to hers. Our sons, both about three years of age, developed a friendship as well. With them running in and out of the door that separated our two apartments, we saw each other on a daily basis. My parents invited all of us over for dinner. Prema, John, and Depak became part of our extended family.

Prema and I had conversations about our different ways of life. She confided that her marriage was arranged by John’s and her parents. At first, she wondered if she could ever feel attraction to John whose bushy eyebrows had a life of their own, dancing with every expression he made. She talked about the way love grew out of their arranged union, and how romantic love wasn’t a goal for them, compatibility and common values were. Prema shared how daily living was more difficult in India, how she needed to hire help with laundry, cleaning, and other household needs because of the lack of conveniences. She and John didn’t own a car, so they hired a person whose sole job was to walk to the post office and their friends’ homes to hand-deliver letters. She explained how the help depended on that income for their survival.

Our mutual curiosity and respect prevailed with no topic too controversial to explore. Prema’s year in the United States was over too quickly. However, by then she and I came to a deep understanding. It was as if our hearts had been friends for years. We weren’t done conversing and, therefore, communicated by letter the rest of our lives. Her son, Depak, and his wife visited us about 20 years later as he wanted to show his wife where he had lived in Minnesota when he was a small child. He also came to tell me that Prema was not well. It was a sad day for me when I learned she had died. These many years later, I still miss her.

Prema was different from me. She was a different race, a different culture, a different color. She admired my appearance; I envied hers, especially her braid -- black-and silky-as-a-raven’s feather -- that hung down her back. She prepared and ate different food. She dressed differently. She spoke a different language (several, in fact, including mine). Her customs and some of her values were different. But how grateful I am that our differences didn’t result in rejection nor indifference – neither on her part nor mine. Rather, by taking time to listen to each other’s stories, to our hopes and dreams, and to our joys and sorrows, we found understanding and companionship. In doing so, our lives were enriched.

Our time on this earth is not long. May our legacy be that we promoted racial justice and valued human life in all its diversity.

The photo shows a sari sent to me from the seminary in India where George taught for six weeks one year. I gave it to IUCC to be used for an altar cloth for special occasions when red and gold are appropriate.
Since the dramatic restrictions of the initial pandemic outbreak have been easing and our children are moving into a less rigid (but still not normal) set of routines, we are examining the impact the health and social crisis has had on their lives. Last month we reminded ourselves that individuals vary greatly from one another, even in the same family, and it is therefore not very helpful to talk about how to assess and help “kids.” None of us, and none of them, is quite like another. Last month we examined possibilities for differences in external life situations that would impact how well, or how badly, a particular young person has been impacted. Just as features outside of oneself differ from person to person and family to family, internal features differ in ways that impact adjustments to challenging situations. As we review some of these, think of each of your children – whether it’s different children in a family or in a learning situation.

**Insight.** Children differ in how well they assess what is going on. You’ve heard it said that some people “live in their own world,” and that is true. Some children know themselves very much as they are, and are thus easy to talk to when they are giving signals that they are in distress or having difficulty. Other children do not have an honest assessment of themselves and this makes it much more challenging to talk with them about signs and symptoms you are noticing that indicate they are having trouble. Some children quickly say “that’s not true” when you make an accurate observation of their behavior. Working with these children/teens requires much more skill and patience. In addition, as we notice each time we watch the news, people of all ages vary greatly from one another, even in the same family, and it is therefore not very helpful to talk about how to assess and help “kids.” None of us, and none of them, is quite like another. Last month we examined possibilities for differences in external life situations that would impact how well, or how badly, a particular young person has been impacted. Just as features outside of oneself differ from person to person and family to family, internal features differ in ways that impact adjustments to challenging situations. As we review some of these, think of each of your children – whether it’s different children in a family or in a learning situation.

**Creativity.** Some kids can create a wonderland of fun with some chairs and a couple of blankets. Other kids can’t figure out what to do with anything that doesn’t spell out exactly how it works. This can lead to much more dependence on games and gadgets that will further stifle their creativity, and again cause frustration with someone who doesn’t have time to engage with them. It’s also true that some kids, like some adults, can find beauty in the midst of ugliness. We all saw this when quarantined families and neighborhoods found clever ways to engage.

**Humor.** Not everyone is “funny.” Luckily, there are two kinds of humor. There are those who “create” humor and cause others to laugh. Then there are people who “appreciate” humor, and are able to laugh along with others even if they are not particularly clever themselves. Laughter is always a stress reliever, and children without a healthy sense of humor experience and cause much more stress than those with a healthy dose.

**Morality.** We’ve all heard the expression “s/he’s just a good kid.” That’s true for some kids. They just seem to possess a wonderful sense of goodness, kindness, generosity, and caring. It’s part of the package of who they are. Unhappily, other kids, for whatever reasons, just don’t exhibit much kindness and caring toward others. This deficit then backfires on them because in return for their lack of warmth and caring, they receive less from others. This lack of inner peace and warmth from others makes dealing with all challenges more difficult.

**Time to go to work.** Notice what you see in each of the children/teens you engage with, AND, tell them what you see. Inner strengths are gifts for life.
Many people are familiar with the concept of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) or rational intelligence; some are familiar with psychologist Daniel Goldman’s Emotional Intelligence (EI) or Emotional Quotient (EQ) theory as explained in his 1995 best seller book Emotional Intelligence. Intelligence quotient or rational intelligence is related to material capital, and this concept is a function of “What I Think” whereas emotional intelligence is related to social capital as a function of “What I Feel.” In my personal experience as an educational practitioner in higher education, I have had a lot of interaction with many persons who have high IQs but whom, sadly and unfortunately, also have low EQs and near zero Spiritual Quotients (SQ).

Intelligence quotient can be described as our rational, logical, rule-bound problem-solving intelligence whereas emotional intelligence can be described as the manifestation of trust, empathy, emotional self-awareness, self-control, and the ability to appropriately respond to the emotions of others. In my July 2021 article titled Let’s Talk! Some Thoughts and Ideas for Having Healthy Discussions About Racism, White Privilege, Diversity and Inclusion, I delineated a number of ways one can have difficult conversations with others with whom we may not see eye-to-eye on certain issues. Being able to engage in civil discourse is something that in my opinion is important if we want to be a truly diverse and inclusive church.

Craig and Mary Repp have been leading a discussion group on the topic of civil discourse by presenting Thursday evening meetings based on a program titled Make me an Instrument of Your Peace. I could not be happier in knowing that this is taking place because as a congregation we have made significant progress and we should continue to make progress by making every effort to shed light on issues that are important and yet controversial. Having difficult conversations is likely to yield an increased heart rate, tension, nervousness or the feeling that we may be rocking the boat.

So what is Spiritual Quotient (SQ) or Spiritual Intelligence (SI)? Spiritual quotient or spiritual intelligence is the ability to access higher meanings, values, abiding purposes, and unconscious aspects of the Self and to embed these meanings, values, and purposes in living richer and more creative lives. Signs of high SQ include one’s ability to think out of the box, humility, and access to energies that go beyond the Self, beyond the ego in dealing with day-to-day concerns. Spiritual intelligence, therefore, is related to spiritual capital as a function of “What I Am.” Spiritual intelligence is grounded on the following twelve principles which are briefly and subsequently discussed:

1. Self-Awareness.
2. Spontaneity.
4. Holism.
5. Compassion.
7. Independence.
8. Humility.
10. Ability to Reframe.
12. Sense of Vocation.

Self-Awareness is about the ability to recognize what one cares about, what we live for, and what one would die for. In other words, Self Awareness means being true to ourselves while respecting others with whom we may disagree. Spontaneity is about willingness to let go of our baggage, that is, childhood problems, prejudices, assumptions, values and projections. Spontaneity means being responsive to the moment. Being Vision- and Value-Led is about the capacity to see something that inspires us, that is, being led by a vision and following our hearts. Being led by vision and values allows us to frame issues from the perspective of how we can make a difference. Holism encourages cooperation and collaboration because
we are able to see that we are part of the same system and as such we are able to take responsibility for our part. **Holism**, in my view, is closely linked to the verse “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27, NRSV) in that each of us within the body of Christ has a part of it. **Compassion** is about understanding, with a high degree of empathy, those whom we may consider our foes. **Diversity** is about our willingness and ability to learn from each other. In other words, to celebrate and embrace **Diversity** means that we appreciate when someone rattles our cage so we can think and grow. **Independence** means willingness to stand against the crowd and be unpopular for our convictions. **Humility** is at the opposite spectrum of Independence because we realize that we are small actors in the larger scheme of things and we could be wrong. **Humility** can make us great, not small, because this construct allows us to be a voice in the choir. **Willingness to ask “Why?” Questions** allow us to contemplate why we are not doing something else. **Ability to Reframe** is about having the willingness and humility to see the big picture and see problems from a larger context. **Positive use of Adversity** allows us to learn and grow from past errors, setbacks and our own personal suffering. **Positive use of Adversity** opens the door to embark on a different course. **Sense of Vocation** is about being called upon to be of service and to give something back. **Sense of Vocation**, in my view is linked to the verse “In all of this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35, NRSV).

Spiritual Intelligence (SI) or Spiritual Quotient (SQ) is a function of the presence of God inclusive of our Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and our Emotional Quotient (EQ), where IQ is about thought, EQ is about emotion and SI or SQ is about purpose. Spiritual Intelligence or Spiritual Quotient requires humility.

Finally, the equation \( SQ = P \left( IQ + EQ \right) \) means that SQ equals IQ and EQ governed by the soul. When our soul governs IQ and EQ our ego is removed from command and SQ becomes the most valuable personal resource available because it puts our soul in command. The soul does a much better job than the ego since the soul is the source of wisdom, compassion, integrity, joy, love, creativity, and peace.

**Service Opportunities with Congregational Care**

The Congregational Care Ministry is the hands and heart of Jesus for our members in need. We specifically need people to:

- Visit, call, or write to those who are unable to come to church due to illness or injury.
- Provide rides to church or appointments when other transportation is not available.
- Prepare and deliver meals on an occasional basis in times of hardship.
- Knit a prayer shawl for members with special needs.
- Help with memorial receptions.

If you are willing to help provide concrete care for IUCC members in time of need, please let us know the ways in which you are willing to provide support. We would also be glad to talk with you if you have questions.

Kathi Smith kspittsy@gmail.com or Diane Rust dianerust@gmail.com
Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi: A Story of Reclaiming Personal Identity and Restoring Self-Worth

by The Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge
Member, Diversity & Inclusion Ministry

Eduardo’s life story reflects the dignity, power and resilience of the human spirit. He defines his ethnicity as LatinX. When asked to complete this sentence, “America is……” Eduardo’s response is “… not a welcoming place.” When asked to complete this sentence, “My experience in the United States has been…” his response is “…very challenging.”

Coming to America as a teenager was a psychologically brutal experience for Eduardo. In 1977, at age 17, he left Venezuela and came to the United States with his father. There were immigration problems because his father had a business partner who was fraudulently selling land in the Caribbean coast of Venezuela that did not exist.

Eduardo’s point of entry to the U.S. was Miami, and he ended up living in Salt Lake City, Utah (a largely Mormon state). Eduardo was told by his father, who was told by his Mormon friends, that in order to “make it” in America, he must totally divest himself of his culture, language, and self-expression. He was forced to become a Mormon, whereas previously he had been a Roman Catholic (having attended a Maronite parish). A further assault on his personhood was changing his name from Eduardo Jesús to Edward Jesse. Eduardo states, “When you take a person’s name and culture away, you destroy them.” He was sometimes called “Eddie,” an additional reminder of being stripped of his culture, self-identity and self-worth. It would not be until the early 1990s that Eduardo would reclaim his personhood and his self-esteem. He wanted to receive his doctoral degree under his baptized name.

Although he wanted to fit in, Eduardo did not believe that he could be accepted for who he was. He had been told not to speak any Spanish and to hide his true identity. His fellow teenage friends, many of whom were Mormons, asked him if before coming to America he had eaten with knives, forks and spoons. It was a degrading experience in which he felt he was being treated like an uncivilized aborigine. A further experience of prejudice and discrimination took place when one of the Mormon leaders, attempting to make conversation, asked Eduardo what he was studying in school. He believed it to be a form of micro-aggression, with the implication that people with his ethnicity tended not be very intelligent.

In contrast to the experience of being in America and trying to fit in to be accepted, Eduardo had experienced a radically different lifestyle in Venezuela. He grew up in an affluent family who was highly educated. His father was an executive in an insurance company and his mother was a homemaker. His father recognized that Eduardo had a special ability in mathematics, so he hired a mathematics tutor for him. Eduardo now realizes how privileged he was growing up in Venezuela, attending private schools and having personal tutors. He still has the mathematics book that led him to become an academic mathematician and mathematics educator. Eduardo comments that in just four hours his whole life changed once he boarded a Pan American Airline bound from Caracas to Miami, Florida. His mother was very strict and quite proper. She and his father divorced, and he lived with his mother until the opportunity arose to come to the United States with his father.

Eduardo’s mother and the rest of his family came to the U.S. shortly after the election of George W. Bush. Eduardo’s family did not experience any difficulties with immigration and he, again, recognizes his privilege. Eduardo’s brother, who came with him, realized his childhood dream of working as a high profile government professional within closed circles. His brother had close ties with the Republican Party and many members of the Bush Administration. Eduardo has embraced his mother’s love for structure, formality, and proper placements of things, especially at the dinner table. In
addition to a brother, Eduardo also has a sister who is an architect and another sister who studied psychology. Eduardo’s brother who was closely associated with the US Department of Justice studied finance and accounting.

When Eduardo decided to seek his Ed.D. degree in mathematics education, he wanted his highest degree to list his birth name. He is sad that all his prior degrees were earned with a name that was not his given name. He is so proud that his doctoral degree diploma has his original birth name of Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, which will remain so for the rest of his life. This was Eduardo’s triumph. It was his re-birth. He went through his own process to finally say good bye to his old name which was an important event for him as well as an event of being reborn. Saying good bye was extremely difficult and a grieving journey. He believes this was an act of love. The name change made many people within his professional and familial circles very uncomfortable. He went on to publish and deliver many speeches under his new name and make a name for himself in the community college system. In fact he remembers IUCC member Steve Goetz when he knew Eduardo as Eddie (short for Eduardo). He recalls how welcoming and supportive Steve was when the two worked together.

Looking back on his life in the U.S., Eduardo takes a positive view. He sees himself better off today than he would have been in Venezuela, a country that he currently sees falling apart. He reports that at the present time, highly educated people coming to the U.S. from Venezuela are ending up doing menial jobs. He sees himself as a stronger person due to his experience here.

According to Eduardo, his greatest ethnic challenge has been to achieve success in his profession in higher education. He has taught all kinds of mathematics courses at Orange Coast College, from the basic mathematics to multivariable calculus, statistics, differential equations and probability theory. Eduardo has recently experienced some serious prejudice and discrimination with his position at the college. He has achieved professional success and has written 13 textbooks. He says the reason for pursuing his doctorate was mostly to prove that he has what it takes, but now he feels that he doesn’t have to prove anything to anyone.

Eduardo is currently attending the New Theological Seminary of the West and working on his MDiv degree. He pursued theological studies as a result of a near death experience. He expects to graduate within 1.5 years after retirement at the end of 2021. He will use a lot of the information in a variety of personal and professional situations. His interest in the study of theology has surpassed his previous interest in mathematics. Eduardo and his wife, Cheryl, have a son, Mikhail.

IUCC has been a Godsend for Eduardo. He was church shopping, looking for a church with more structure, including a more formal liturgy in the church service. He attended an IUCC discussion group that dealt with the issue of racism that was led by The Rev. Steve Swope. He was very impressed and began attending our church.

Eduardo really likes the Diversity and Inclusion (D & I) Ministry. He is one of the three leaders. He relates, “It is a place where people can come and receive support.” At our D & I meetings, people are unusually candid and share their feelings and problems openly in a safe and accepting environment. He often says that he learns a lot from others in the group.

It took a great deal of resiliency for a 17 year old LatinX teenager from Venezuela - who was stripped of his identity and self-worth - to achieve a doctorate in education in mathematics education and fulfill the goal of professional success in higher education. His story exemplifies the power and dignity of the human spirit, blessed by God and manifested in the life of Jesus.

[Note: Our names are important. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi represents “Arismendi” as the father’s name, and “Pardi” (originally Leopardi) as the mother’s name. Not having both names in Eduardo’s culture means that a person is “illegitimate.” Jesús is a very common name in the Latin X culture. Eduardo says that his paternal name Arismendi is a Basque surname that means Oak Field and his maternal name Pardi means Leopard in Italian from the Island of Elba.]