Join IUCC on Sunday, September 12, as we return to TWO live services (9:30 and 11 a.m.)!

We’ll be welcoming back our fabulous Chancel Choir...

AND enjoying a Ministries Fair!

You know you’ve missed it! Remember how fun our 2020 Ministries Fair was? Check out the photos below. Visit our ministry folks on the outside patio to find out how YOU can participate!
“RE-NEW” – Planting Seeds of Faith, Fun & God’s Love!

On August 14, MYP and other ministries got together to provide a morning of activities for kids and youth to have fun and be inspired by different ways to care and create. Activities included stories, crafts, and planting!

Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano
What a treat on August 15 for 40 IUCCers to enjoy some outdoor fellowship at nearby Mike Ward Community Park followed by a free “Symphony in the Cities” concert!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
I cannot believe that we are approaching the one year anniversary of my arrival as your pastor! I have jokingly said to a few of you, “I’ve almost been here a year, but my first day is on September 12th!”

In reality, I don’t want to undermine the real and important ministry we’ve shared over these nearly 12 months - all during a pandemic! We proved that we can be church even if we didn’t meet in a building and that real bonds could form even when we communicated solely through a screen. The holy spirit worked through us in creative services and experiences manifested to intentionally connect us with one another. I’m pretty sure our Christmas Pageant was the best one I’d ever seen and I’d say our Youth Sunday was too! I felt like I inadvertently became the “Vaccine Queen” because nothing said, “I care” like “I’ve got a vaccine appointment for you.” So, I did my best to help when it was challenging to navigate the system knowing that everyone would feel safer when all of us could get that vaccine. When we finally had a first gathering early on Easter morn, this progressive Christian experienced the risen body of Christ in an entirely new and profound way! Even though there were just a few dozen of us there, it was undoubtedly the most powerful Easter of my life! Then came Pentecost and this church was on fire! June brought an in-person Pride celebration and before you knew it we were back for a summer of hybrid first services as we sought “The Gospel Truth” asking “Whose Good News Is it?”

So, obviously, September 12th is not my first day on the job, but in many ways it feels like a day of new beginnings as we return back to two services, our chancel choir “takes the stage” and we celebrate our many ministries together. I hope that you’ll come celebrate with us and celebrate this shared ministry that you and I have embarked upon together. The best thing about getting a second first day is that it just means the honeymoon is all the sweeter because now we actually know each other a whole lot better than we did a year ago!

If you aren’t ready to come back yet - no pressure! We want to make sure you feel safe and so while we’re going to great efforts to make sure the church site is as safe as possible, church is online and we’re intentional about keeping it there indefinitely. We are investing in our ministry with a new sound system so that “you with ears can hear,” as Jesus would say. We not only have hybrid services, all of our classes and most meetings are available online (many hybrid). We’re eager to connect with you and expand our ministry so that others who can’t or aren’t ready for in-person ministry can connect. If you are not geographically near IUCC - no problem. If you moved away, or have just found us, we want you to know that IUCC recognizes that a church is bigger than the walls that support the building. The Spirit binds and connects in truly miraculous ways. We’re leaning into new ways of doing church and hope that you’ll be open to participating in whatever way you feel most comfortable. So, if you’re planning on staying in your PJs - we got you covered! Just be sure you connect with me because I really do want to connect with you!

So let’s celebrate our ministry and all that comes with the new beginnings September promises! There’s a lot of fun and exciting worship and activities headed our way: from our Labor Day Sunday, to our Welcome Back Bash on September 12th, to a special service on Caregiving with a focus on Vivian Johnson’s new book “Love in a Time of Crisis,” to one of my favorite celebrations: a “Blessing of the Animals” on September 26th. Bring your dogs, cats, parrots, turtles, rabbits (oh, you name it, and I’ll bless it!) at 3 pm for an afternoon blessing!

IUCC Family, I’m filled with gratitude. I know this first year of our ministry together didn’t look the way any of us planned it, but given the hand we were dealt, we can be proud of the way we’ve played it! I feel so blessed to be in ministry with you and even though we don’t know what Delta or the next variant will do to us, I’m confident that the Spirit will continue to work in us and through us and we will be the church that God calls us to be!

So happy anniversary! Let’s celebrate!

Pastor Sarah
And once again September appears, with its school buses and new backpacks and promises of autumn – however that shows itself in southern California! It also brings lots of new opportunities.

First, we’re bringing back the 11:00 Sunday worship service – and the Chancel Choir! As before the pandemic, the Choir will sing at both the 9:30 and 11:00 services, and for the present they will be masked.

With more people here, especially between the two services, everyone needs to be intentional about safe, healthy practices. We will continue to wear masks during worship and avoid shared items like hymnals, offering plates, etc. We also ask you to limit Alleluia hand-holding to those in your household.

Please DO NOT include others in hand-holding; visitors may not be ready for physical contact, but they also may be reluctant to offend someone stretching out a hand. Do THEM a favor, and just don’t.

Also, even before you leave home, do an honest health self-check. Do you have a temperature higher than 99.9 degrees? Do you have Covid symptoms (frequent cough, fever, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, loss of taste/smell)? Have you been diagnosed, or in contact, with someone who has Covid-19?

You can also use the CDC’s online self-checker: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/coronavirus-self-checker.html. But for everyone’s sake, play it safe. If you’re symptomatic – or just not feeling 100% - stay home and get well.

There are new opportunities in adult education, too. Diversity & Inclusion has begun another book study, on Cathy Park Hong’s *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, meeting Tuesday mornings or Thursday evenings.

Pastor Sarah joins Bil Aulenbach for a four-week look at “Growing as a Progressive Christian” on Wednesday evenings or Thursday mornings this month. Women’s book study groups are signing up now and starting in October.

And Comma Groups will start signing up this month, too! Watch the weekly email updates for a link to sign up for a Comma Group, IUCC’s small-groups program of study and community. This year’s groups will be studying up-to-date commentary from a variety of blogs by diverse authors!

You will also have a chance to register for a Saturday afternoon forum on “The Evolution of Black Music” by actor/advocate/educator – and former IUCC Choral Intern – Angelica Rowell! Angelica will be here on Saturday, Sept. 25, speaking and singing at 1:00 pm. You don’t want to miss this!

Of course, Ken Wyant’s Tuesday Bible Study continues each week at 4:00 pm, and you can join the conversation here at IUCC or online via Zoom. The lively group is reading through the book of Genesis right now and enjoying Ken’s always-stimulating ideas!

There’s a new person to greet in the sound booth on Sunday mornings! Say hello to Gem Grace, who is also creating and posting videos throughout the week.
From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes

If you’ve been listening to Pastor Sarah’s sermon series “The Gospel Truth: Whose Good News is It?” I’m sure you’ve been as enthralled as I have. The breadth and depth of her scholarship is impressive, and her willingness to share that knowledge in such a clear and entertaining way makes church as fun as it is educational. I’d heard about the Gnostic texts but never had anyone explain them quite the way she does. It’s fascinating, and I’m learning a lot!

We are so fortunate at IUCC to have the staff we do – people who work incredibly hard to bring us new and innovative approaches to worship and music. If you’ve been paying close attention, you’ve probably noticed that every Sunday has a theme, and every piece of the service is tied into that theme. The Bible reading, the sermon, the Fresh Word, and the music are carefully chosen and woven together to create an experience that hones and reinforces the central message. Sometimes it’s a familiar message, but other times it reaches beyond to include a more imaginative and thought-provoking concept that stimulates the mind and engages the spirit. I love to watch it all unfold each Sunday.

We’ll be resuming our two in-person worship services this month, and I hope you’ll come out to celebrate with us! September 12 will feature the return of our Chancel Choir (all vaccinated and wearing masks to observe safety protocols), which will be a huge treat. We’ve hired a new accompanist and two new choral interns, so the music is sure to be exceptionally good. There will be a Ministry Fair after each service (held outside for safety’s sake), and you’ll have an opportunity to find out about all the wonderful ministries and committees available at IUCC and sign up if you want to participate.

It amazes me that we’ve managed to maintain and even enhance the work of our ministries in spite of the pandemic. All of them have found ways to connect in clever and innovative new ways. Here are just a few:

- The Congregational Care Ministry sends cards, delivers meals, and makes phone calls to those who are ill;
- The Ministry with Young People plans fun and educational activities for our kiddos (see photos of the recent youth event on page 2);
- The Fund Development Committee is creating a bold new legacy program to take us beyond stewardship;
- The Child Care Committee is trying innovative new ways to boost enrollment at our preschool;
- The Diversity & Inclusion Ministry is offering discussion groups and ethnic dining opportunities so folks can learn about other cultures;
- The Membership Committee welcomed us to attend a “Symphony in the Cities” event that drew about 40 members and friends of IUCC (see page 3 for photos);
- The Advocates for Peace & Justice stay informed about current events and send letters in support of causes that matter to all of us; and
- Well, I could go on, but that’s enough for now - you get the general idea! Our ministry chairs and their members are doing a fantastic job of providing us with opportunities to stay active and involved.

Very soon, we’ll be embarking on a strategic planning process to envision the future of IUCC. It may seem a bit early (sometimes I think that too!), but why not do some brainstorming and dreaming? We have a beautiful new building, wonderful staff, a vibrant and well-connected new pastor, amazing members, and so much potential here at IUCC - it’s time we put our minds together to figure out how to harness all that energy and step into the future with boldness and courage. We’ve already stopped doing “business as usual” (not much choice there!), so this may be the perfect time to think about changing things up and charting some new territory.

I’m hoping we can build on our new online presence to provide even higher quality Sunday services to reach more people and spread the news about Progressive Christianity. The Admin Board has authorized the purchase of a new sound board that should help a lot with that! There may be ways for us to work with other local UCC churches to combine resources and grow programs, and that’s worth exploring too. There are many opportunities out there - we just need to dream big and see where God leads us.

In hope and optimism,

Tricia
Calling all women! New books, new groups, new discussions! Join the fun!

by Laura Long

New women’s book discussion groups will be forming again, meeting in person for the vaccinated and following CDC recommended protocols. Hybrid meetings may be possible, and an all-ZOOM group will be an option.

The discussion groups will run for 10 weeks, with four suggested titles from which to choose. Any woman is invited to join—there will be ample room for all. Come and join the fun with great discussions among new and familiar friends. Book groups work best when everyone reads the book! If reading doesn’t fit your life right now, look for other women-oriented activities starting soon. Find out more at the Ministry Fair after worship services on September 12.

Participants may choose one of four weekly groups:
- Friday Group at 1 to 3 p.m. from Oct. 1 to Dec. 3
- Saturday Group at 9 to 11 a.m. from Oct. 2 to Dec. 4
- Tuesday Group at 6:30 to 8 p.m. from Oct. 5 to Dec. 7
- All ZOOM group (time and date to be determined by group members)

The suggested titles for this session are:

**Cassandra Speaks: When Women are the Storytellers, the Human Story Changes.** Elizabeth Lesser. What story would Eve tell about picking the apple or Pandora about opening the box? Elizabeth Lesser believes that if women’s voices had been equally heard and respected throughout history, humankind would have followed different hero myths and guiding stories—stories that value caretaking, champion compassion, and elevate communication over vengeance and violence.

**Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy.** Anne Lamott. To explore where to find meaning in life, Anne Lamott suggest we begin by “facing a great big mess, especially the great big mess of ourselves.” It’s up to each of us to recognize the presence and importance of mercy everywhere—“within us and outside us, all around us”—and to use it to forge a deeper understanding of ourselves and more honest connections with each other.

**Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone.** Brené Brown. “True belonging doesn’t require us to change who we are. It requires us to be who we are.” Social scientist Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, has sparked a global conversation about the experiences that bring meaning to our lives—experiences of courage, vulnerability, love, belonging, shame, and empathy. In Braving the Wilderness, Brown redefines what it means to truly belong in an age of increased polarization. With her trademark mix of research, storytelling, and honesty, Brown will again change the cultural conversation while mapping a clear path to true belonging.

**Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy.** Anne Lamott. To explore where to find meaning in life, Anne Lamott suggest we begin by “facing a great big mess, especially the great big mess of ourselves.” It’s up to each of us to recognize the presence and importance of mercy everywhere—“within us and outside us, all around us”—and to use it to forge a deeper understanding of ourselves and more honest connections with each other.

Here’s how it works. Send an email to iuccbooks2122@gmail.com with the following information: (1) Your first and last name; (2) Your first and second choice for a group, selecting from: Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, Tuesday evening, or ZOOM; and (3) Are you willing to be an organizer for your assigned group?

Registration opens August 28 and closes September 15. You will receive an email the week of September 19 with your assigned group. A group organizer will be selected for each group from among the registrants. Group organizers handle the logistics: set up the meetings, send reminders, and hold the ZOOM account (if using that option). They convene the group, but do not lead every discussion; instead, group members share facilitation. Group members decide together how to divide their selected book into weekly assignments, such as by chapters, and members rotate the responsibility for facilitating discussions. Those who do not feel comfortable facilitating may decline, but the job is simple, often just a matter of getting the discussion started. A commitment to the group is necessary through agreeing to read the content, to faithful attend group meetings, join the discussion, and respect others’ opinions and privacy. Your group organizer will reach out to arrange for an organizational meeting to get acquainted, reach a consensus on which book to read, and assign the weekly facilitation. You are off and running!
Join us for Trunk or Treat at IUCC!

Trunk or Treat

SAVE THE DATE!
Sunday, Oct 31
12:15 p.m.
IUCC Parking Lot

Kids & young-at-heart are invited to come in costume and go trick-or-treating to various decorated car trunks, bikes, scooters, & spots!

Volunteers can offer treats and decorate! Volunteers choose the kinds of items they pass out (candy, small toys, etc.) and should plan for about 30 visitors. Allergy friendly items are especially welcome! Decorate your trunks/baskets/spots as if they are your home during Halloween.

Please contact Lauren (LLouie735@gmail.com) or other MYP staff or leaders with any Trunk or Treat questions!

Trunk or Treat is a cherished tradition at IUCC! Check out these fun photos from the past!

Support AIDS Walk OC

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.

9/17  Kiana Austin       9/26  Susie Lang
9/17  Maya Austin       9/14  Laura Long
9/17  Scott Bollens     9/16  JoAnne Mansell
9/16  Lavinia Cooper    9/29  Iris Mecartney
9/14  Alyssa Cornett    9/25  Don Mineo
9/14  Judy Curry        9/22  Ava Mitchell
9/26  Ruby Fulton       9/11  Jeff Oleson
9/26  Greg Furtado      9/20  Sofia Portillo
9/08  Peggy Goetz       9/09  Suellen Rowe
9/19  Vivian Johnson    9/20  Stephanie Sanders
9/06  Cristina Jones    9/18  Mary Swope
9/23  Lizabeth Kerr     9/10  Paul Thornton
The House of Ruth of Family Promise of OC

Family Promise has embarked upon a project to triple its capacity to house the homeless of Orange County by building and staffing the House of Ruth. This is a new housing community and a Navigation Center. Seven apartment-style housing units ranging in size from one to three bedrooms will provide short-term transitional housing for homeless families. This design will particularly support larger families, including multi-generational families, that typically cannot be accommodated by other housing programs. The Navigation Center is designed to support more than 200 families annually with access to housing; safe, private showers and bathrooms; laundering facilities as well as computers; employment assistance tools; and resources they require.

Developed in partnership with the City of Tustin and HomeAide Orange County, Family Promise is embarking on this $3.7 million campaign to build and staff the House of Ruth, thanks in large part to the City of Tustin’s donation of the land. Family Promise is reaching out to Orange County’s faith communities for support in this endeavor.

The Mission & Service Ministry has been focusing on helping the unhoused this year, and we really support this worthy project.

Family Promise Update - From Mission & Service

Emergency Shelter Program
Family Promise aims to reopen the Emergency Shelter hosting rotation on Sunday, September 12th. Since the program is not currently requiring participants to be vaccinated, IUCC will hold off on hosting until 2022.

Transitional Housing Program Update
In the months ahead FP looks forward to having IKEA renovate their second transitional home, Jacob House. They are thrilled with the results from June’s renovation of Kramer House and can’t wait for the new transformation!
In preparation for the house facelift, it was decided that the Jacob House garage also needed some help. Along with the help of OneOC volunteers, the entire garage at Jacob House was cleaned out (lots of “stuff” had been accumulated over the years!). Check out the photo of the new empty space at right!

In addition, Family Promise accepted an Eagle Scout project for the fall where the entire garage will be renovated with better storage solutions and to make a "hang out" area for older kids. This will provide the older kids with a space for themselves where they can relax away from their bedrooms and the shared communal space.

Supportive Services Program Update
FP continues to provide much-needed diapers and wipes to low-income families throughout Orange County. The families served do not need to qualify for the program directly - all they need to do is make an appointment with the case management team. Graduate families are also supported with much needed gas gift cards, grocery gift cards, laundry money, rental assistance, and case management.

Save the Date!
The date of the Family Promise Annual Gala is set for Saturday, October 23rd. Mark your calendars!
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 writing 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

~ YOU ARE INVITED ~

To a Celebration of Life and Friendship Honoring GEORGE S. JOHNSON

Sunday, October 10, 2021 ~ 3 p.m.
Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA

In Gratitude for the Memory of George S. Johnson
September 20, 1933 - October 9, 2020

For those unable to attend, the service will be available via the IUCC YouTube channel within 24 hours of the service.
Many of you will likely remember the old Grateful Dead song “Truckin’” which includes these words:

“Sometimes the light’s all shinin’ on me
Other times, I can barely see
Lately, it occurs to me
What a long, strange trip it’s been.”

While I can’t say that I’m a major Deadhead, that song resonates in my imagination when I think back over the past sixteen or so months and reflect upon how COVID 19 has changed not just the landscape of the choral world, but the entire world. None of us could have predicted the extent to which our singing lives would be upended, and I’m sure many of us in this choir are still wondering “what the heck just happened?”

When the world shut down in March of 2020, we all did our very best to make the best of a truly terrible situation. I felt so bad for ALL teachers and their students across the world. But there were two kinds of teachers, I thought, who were especially challenged: online pre-K and Kindergarten teachers for the challenge of engaging those tiny, short-attention-span humans through remote video screens, but also for every choir director who was reduced to holding choir through Zoom in an environment where no two people could sing together in real time.

At IUCC we managed to create some truly beautiful and inspiring “virtual choir videos” that we can always watch again and be proud of for years to come. We continued to inspire the congregation through our music. I am so very hopeful that we may be emerging into some sort of new normal...a different environment where singing together can recommence with certain careful precautions, and with vaccines to help us when we need them most. What a long, strange trip it’s been!

Virtual choir taught us a lot about ourselves, and I know that it wasn’t an exercise that everyone cared for or wanted to participate in...I get it...choir is all about community, joy, singing together, sharing our love through music, and being more while together than we could ever be alone. I hope our choir members are planning to come back and sing again in person. “All God’s Critters got a place in THIS choir.”

People have been asking about the precautions the choir will take upon our return to the Sanctuary. First off, all members will need to be vaccinated to sing in the choir.

With the Delta variant in the community, we can’t take the chance of compromising the unvaccinated who are especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of a COVID 19 infection. So called “break-through” infections have been largely mild for people who are vaccinated, and we must protect ourselves as much as we can while also resuming and reclaiming our lives in this strange new world. Additionally, choir members will wear their masks 100% of the time when they are in the sanctuary, even when they are singing in rehearsals and during the Sunday anthems. Soloists have been participating unmasked this summer during services (as has Pastor Sarah) but unmasking as a choir creates the possibility of too many aerosols in one place and at one time. I have been rehearsing at CSUF indoors with my choirs with masks on and while it is not ideal (you can’t see facial expressions or vowel shapes) it is not a bad experience and singing in person is AMAZING after all this time.

Our new interns, Jocelyne Ramirez (alto) and Wendy Wiebach (soprano) will be joining us starting on Sept. 7th. Jaime Reza (our wonderful tenor intern) will be returning.

I am overjoyed to announce that we have finally hired someone to replace Josh Chandra, who got married and moved to Wisconsin over the summer. Our new IUCC Pianist/Collaborative Accompanist is Yuyoung Jeong. She is a college graduate who earned the Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance in 2016 and the Master of Music in Piano Performance in 2019, both at Cal State Fullerton.

Yuyoung is presently pursuing an Artist Diploma in Piano Performance at CSUF as a student of Dr. Robert Watson. Yuyoung was most recently the Pianist/Choir Accompanist at St. John’s Lutheran Church of Orange. During the course of her academic career, she also managed to accrue nearly 12 years of work experience. She had the privilege of working with various vocal/instrumental students at CSU Fullerton, various church choirs, and at the Southlands Christian School where she learned valuable professional skills. In both her academic and professional life she has been consistently praised as a professional and diligent worker. We are so fortunate to have Yuyoung joining our musical team at IUCC. She will be able to start with us on September 9 when we return to rehearsing in the sanctuary. Welcome Yuyoung Jeong!

- Dr. Chris Peterson, IUCC Director of Music
Choir Party Photos

Our Chancel Choir is getting ready to return, and they celebrated at a Choir Party on August 28!

Photos courtesy of Keith Boyum

Music Chair Pat Sauter welcomes new choral interns
Jocelyne Ramirez (alto) and Wendy Wiebach (Soprano)

Pastor Sarah with choir friends

Wild parrots dropped by to sing for the party!
You have another opportunity for a cross-cultural dinner coming up in September! So far, we have had two of these outings and both were enjoyed by all who attended. Our hosts were gracious in sharing their stories and the food was delicious. The fine opportunity for simple fellowship made it all extra-special. Our not-so-secret mission is to equip ourselves with better understanding of the diverse people in our community, making it possible for us to include and work alongside all of our neighbors to make a better world.

The first outing, in July, was at the Hen House Grill in Irvine. We enjoyed Persian food and the stories we heard from the supervisor, Mehrdad. Earlier this month, we enjoyed Venezuelan food at Mil Jugos in Santa Ana. Norah Briceño, the proprietress, shared her passion for the food and her experience in coming to the US.

The next outing is set for September 11. We’re aiming for 5:30 p.m. This time we will enjoy each other’s company along with Vietnamese food at Pho So 1 just up the street from IUCC at Culver and Alton. Kacy, the proprietress, will share with us about the food, Vietnamese culture, and her immigrant experience. [If any of the restaurant choices are not your choice of food, come along for the learning and fellowship and just enjoy a beverage.] Please contact Craig Repp if you believe you will be able to join us. It will help us to know how many of the patio tables to reserve for the group. craigrepp@gmail.com or 949-463-0331

It’s not too late to join in on the discussions arising from Cathy Park Hong’s **Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning**. Please see the Friday and Tuesday email blasts for details. Sessions are being held on Zoom, Tuesdays at 9:00 a.m. or Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.

An award-winning poet, Hong has written 7 essays in which she examines her racial identity as a Korean American and a child of immigrants. She pointedly comments on the current racial and cultural landscape while analyzing the concept she calls “minor feelings” - emotions “built from the sediments of everyday racial experience and the irritant of having one’s perception of reality constantly questioned or dismissed.”
Marginalization

To marginalized groups like Blacks, Hispanics and members of the LGBTQA community, we can add our veterans who served in all theaters of war. Veterans have been marginalized in three ways: (1) The serious lack of medical and mental health treatment. We have let our veterans down woefully - a shameful lack of patriotism; (2) The national disgrace of homeless veterans, veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (still poorly treated), and veteran suicides; and (3) The treatment of Vietnam Veterans after they returned home after the war, some of whom were called “baby killers.” I know a Vietnam veteran who was actually spat on when he returned to the U.S. Others have had different bad experiences because the Vietnam War was unpopular and because we lost the war politically. (Susan Sayre reports that during the Vietnam War, she took a man wearing a Navy uniform to a restaurant in Laguna Beach, and the restaurant staff refused to serve them.)

Bil Aulenbach

Bil served with the U.S. Marine Corps in Korea, rising to the rank of Captain. This was an unpopular war, but the Vietnam war was the more unpopular of the two. Bil enjoyed being in the Marine Corps, although in basic training the Sergeant gave him very difficult time.

Bil has possessed outstanding physicality, reflected in his athletic ability. He made varsity in lacrosse and soccer in his freshman year and was an All-American Honorable Mention in both sports. His team went on to win the Midwest Championship in lacrosse and soccer.

Bil had a colorful military career. The Marine Corps believed that both he and his father were communist spies and that he was feeding information to other communists. He was under investigation. In contrast, he was a courier, delivering sensitive information all over the Pacific.

Although Bil was feisty to the bone (not “taking crap from anyone”) and was resistant in his basic training, he paradoxically believed in the Marine Corps’ approach to basic training: to first tear people down and then build them back up again, instilling pride in themselves and pride in the Marine Corps. He explains that this is a universal pride, and when one Marine meets another, they share a common tradition and enjoy a special camaraderie. Bil is proud to have been in a former Marine. “Semper fi” means forever faithful, a fitting motto.

Bil began his military career by spending approximately a year in officers candidate school. When he went into the Marines, he had seminary in the back of his mind. In college, his football and lacrosse coach, Bill Stiles, was his hero. Stiles talked Bil into enlisting in the Marine Corps. Bill advanced rapidly in the Marine Corps. He was first stationed at Camp Pendleton and then in Hawaii, where he had orders to become a tank officer. He had not gone to tank school so he had to learn from on-the-job experience.

Bil was also an infantry officer. At one point, he was assigned to be the executive officer of a motor transport unit. An inspection was scheduled, but the Colonel who was to make the inspection came early. The motor transport unit was not prepared, causing an inspection failure. The Colonel to whom Bil answered was unhappy about the failed inspection and took Bil to task. During this time, Bil was made to stand at attention. Finally, he decided to stop standing at attention and stood at ease instead. The Colonel told him to stand at attention again,
but Bil refused, saying “I don’t want to do this anymore.” Bil knew an Episcopal Bishop who interceded for him, contacting the General above the Colonel. After leaving the Marine Corps, he stayed in the reserves until 1960.

There were quite a few Blacks in the Marine Corps. Bil was quite comfortable with them because in his youth he was raised in a black neighborhood. His father was the rector of an Episcopal Church where 60% of the congregation were Black and 40% were White. He reports that he got along well with some of the Black kids. He reflects that it was hard for the poor Black kids to trust him when he lived in a nice house, went to a private Episcopal boys’ school at age 16, and had a car to drive.

A demon for Bil was “being brainwashed to kill” in the Marines. At times, he says he is not sure that anyone can be totally rid of this brainwashing. He talks a lot about agape love as a tool to overcoming that kind of brainwashing.

He went into the ministry after attending The Church Divinity School of the Pacific seminary in Berkeley in the late 60s. He served various churches in Hawaii and in the Marshall Islands. He was fired from one church. From 1969 to 1975, he served on the Bishop’s staff of the Episcopal Church in Honolulu.

Bil and his family moved a lot because their second daughter was a “rubella baby.” She is deaf and legally blind. Unfortunately, when she was 30, because of her vision loss, she walked into a moving car and sustained a second brain injury. They moved from Hawaii to Santa Ana to obtain better schooling for her. There are two other daughters: the older one lives in North Carolina with her husband, and the younger daughter lives in this area with her husband and two daughters, age 16 and 19. Bil and his wife, Annie, have traveled to many places all over the world for work and pleasure.

Bil has many talents. In addition to his athleticism when he was young, he advanced rapidly in the Marine Corps, went into the ministry, became a writer, published five books, and had a psychotherapy practice for about 12 years. In 1970, he received a Master’s Degree in Social Work and became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

Three things stand out with Bil: he is feisty to the bone; he is proud of being a Marine, and he is focused on agape love.

Jim Aynes

Jim served in the US Army from 1966 to 1969. He was deployed to Vietnam for nine months. His rank was a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO, Sergeant SP5) Fire Direction Center Chief, Forward observer, Artillery. He was awarded the Bronze Star, Air Medal, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Air Crew Wings, and combat ribbons. Besides Vietnam, Jim served at Fort Ord, California; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Fort Knox, Kentucky; and Fort Lewis, Washington. He spent most of his time learning about artillery.

He had two main duty assignments: Fire Direction Center Chief, where he was expected to know how to make all the calculations on where the howitzers would be aimed; and Forward Observer in helicopters, where he provided the Fire Direction Center with information they needed to calculate where the howitzers would be aimed in attacks.

Jim’s experience in Vietnam had its good side and its bad side. The good side was that he got to ride around in helicopters. He enjoyed going 100 miles an hour at approximately 10 feet off the ground. The downside was seeing his brothers in arms being killed and wounded. He still recalls the hurt and the dying crying out for help and for their mothers.

Another downside was that he developed PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) due to all the carnage he saw and the attacks by the Viet Cong. His main symptoms were waking up at night and feeling like he was going to die, with his heart pounding in a panic attack. It took 20 years for the VA doctors to properly diagnose and treat this condition. Although he finally received some good treatment (a combination of medications and therapy), he never fully recovered. The condition was debilitating enough that he was unable to work for many years.

Jim comes from a military family. His grandfather served in France as a courier under General Pershing in World War I. His father was a U.S. Marine Corps aviator and served
in combat in World War II and in Korea. Jim’s father was in the Marines when Jim was growing up, and the family moved an average of every nine months.

He is concerned about the lack of appreciation for those who have served our country, some dying and some being wounded in body and in mind. He emphasizes that families sacrificed as well as military personnel. He agrees with Bil, that war is stupid. He quotes General Sherman, who said “War is hell.” He states that he would not like to go back to war again. He also agrees with Bil that veterans have been marginalized and the statistics on homeless veterans and veteran suicides are a disgrace.

Jim was not treated badly after coming back to the United States when he completed his military duty. He returned to college and was treated like anyone else. There were people who were calling veterans “baby killers” but he avoided those people.

He became an attorney and worked in several locations, including The City of Orange, Orange County Department of Education, City of Huntington Beach, County of Tulare, Shade Structures, Inc, State of California Governor’s office and California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Jim married our church moderator, Tricia Aynes, in 1977. They have two married daughters, Alia and Mira. Alia is disabled with Dysautonomia and other ailments. Dysautonomia consists of a failure of the autonomic nervous system to work properly. Mira received her JD degree, and like her parents, became an attorney.

Jim wants people to be more aware that veterans have sacrificed to defend our country. He believes that too many have died for us, giving the last full measure of devotion to our country. Others suffered physical and mental damage in combat. Families made sacrifices too.

Lastly, he wants people to know that most veterans are an asset to this country, and many successful Americans have a background of service in the military. Obviously, Jim is proud of the military.

Summing up
Bil and Jim agree that wars are stupid and that veterans are marginalized. Both are proud of the military and their service. General Sherman said that “war is hell.” War exacts a price from its participants. Bil and Jim have their demons from going to war. Bil was “brainwashed to kill” and finds it difficult to overcome this brainwashing. Jim developed PTSD, from which he never fully recovered. It was my privilege to interview Bil and Jim. They deserve our respect and gratitude for their military service.

From Bil Aulenbach:
Calling All Progressive Christians
I am a 13-year member of IUCC, a retired Episcopal priest, a Progressive Christian, and married to Anne. I have a website www.peacelovejoyhope.com with over 200 of my past blogs as well as some of my wife’s art (mixed media). I write an every-other-week blog under the heading: What Bil Is Saying. I like to share my progressive views as a PC on secular as well as religious issues. I had to stop blogging for year to attend to some health issues, but I just restarted. If you are interested in some futuristic thinking about the church and life, you might want to check out my blog and website. It is free. The website will lead you to my blogs. Any questions, please call me (949) 240 2933.

The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity
By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who…

1. Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;

2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;

3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: * Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, * Believers and agnostics, * Women and men, * Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, * Those of all classes and abilities;

4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;

5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;

6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;

7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;

8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.
As we continue to come out of a very aberrant social situation caused by the Covid-19 health crisis, we’ve been considering how to evaluate our children’s abilities to weather adversity well, and how much help they might need from us. We’ve asked that parents honestly evaluate how well they personally managed the crisis in their homes, and how the ease or difficulties they displayed will have impacted their children. We discussed the issue of individual “resiliency” and how people of all ages differ in their ability to handle stress well. We talked about how important it is to not categorize “children” or “teenagers,” but to look at each child and young person as the unique individual they are, to assess what they are handling well, and where they need adult support.

In July, we reviewed examples of “external” features that contribute to one’s ability to come out of a crisis or trauma relatively intact, or to influence the possibility of emerging with significant emotional scars. Last month, we explored “internal” individual features of resiliency that can explain why some children handle things better than others, even if external factors are the same.

This month we begin looking at one more set of criteria we can use to help us assess whether, and how, the children we love need our help to build up personal strength. They are coming back into a world that has still not recovered, and where some parts of their lives will return to familiar routines, while other parts of their lives will continue to present challenges and insecurities as the virus persists.

We’ve been looking at the many ways children/teens are different. We will make a shift now and bring in ways that each of us is different, and ways that each of us is the same. The Psychologist Abraham Maslow was interested in figuring out the ways in which all people were alike. He was alive during the time when other psychologists (Freud and others) were writing and talking about mental illnesses and the impact of childhood experiences on individual development.

Maslow was more of an “anthropologist” and examined people from a variety of races, cultures, and social situations to see if there were some features that all humans shared. He arrived at a concept still very much alive today that I have always found very helpful in my work with children/teens. His ideas about universal human needs and characteristics are both simple and profound. Understanding these can help us determine both why some children/teens have so much trouble adjusting well to adult expectations, and how adults can either adjust their expectations, or provide the necessary support for young people to adjust to life situations and expectations satisfactorily. You have possibly heard of his theory, referred to as Six Basic Human Needs.

Over the next months, we will review each of these individually with the goal of helping us understand the two important adult responsibilities with regard to these needs. The first is to meet each of these needs for children. The second is to teach children how to meet each of these needs for themselves. The “Basic Needs” are lifelong, beginning at birth, and continue until the end of life. Reviewing how well each of these needs has been met for each individual helps us understand their behavior and emotional well-being. Reviewing how their behavior gives us information about how some needs have not been met satisfactorily helps us understand our responsibility to step in and provide the help they need.

As we wait to see when “life” for our children and teens will return to pre-pandemic levels – we’ll ponder each Basic Need together. They are: Survival; Safety and Security; Belonging; Love; Self-esteem; Self-Actualization.
On August 22, 2021, the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano delivered a sermon on the Gospel of Mary of Magdala. In my recollection of her pre-sermon statement, she alluded to the fact that it is highly unlikely that such Gnostic Gospel would be discussed in a mainstream Christian church. I believe—without proof—that the probability of such event, a sermon on the Gospel of Mary, in a mainstream church, is actually close to zero.

Some facts about the Gospel of Mary are worthy of mention to acquire a basic understanding of what the text is about. Details about its discovery are unclear. The manuscript was sold in Cairo to the German scholar Dr. Carl Reinhardt in 1896 by someone whose name has been lost in history. The first printed edition translated into German was published in 1955.

In this Gnostic Gospel, Mary appears as a disciple and is singled out by Jesus for special teachings. This Gnostic Gospel indicates that the other disciples are discouraged and grieving over Jesus’s death, but Mary attempts to comfort them by reminding them that Jesus’s presence remains with them. The surviving manuscript of this gospel has a number of lacunae (gaps) and unfortunately, Pages 1 through 6 as well as Pages 11 through 14 are missing. I believe that anyone interested in the historical Jesus, a person who is still relevant after millennia, must examine and contemplate these texts which are not included in the Biblical canon.

So how and why were some texts included or not included in the canon? A brief examination of the history of the various Christian Church councils (e.g., Nicaea, Chalcedon, Constantinople, and many others) reveals a great deal of political tension in deciding what is in and what is out. Does this sound familiar? Who gets to determine what is true? But more importantly, how is truth determined, and why does someone’s truth override those with opposing views?

The answer, in my view, is simple. Those who are in power determine what is true and what gets to be included or excluded.

The history of the Christian Church is filled with debates between orthodoxy and heresies. In my examination of this history, in relation to the development of Christianity, the Church Fathers (by the way, a female perspective was never considered) had the final say, and of course, without a dissenting voice. The debates were not inclusive of a feminist perspective.

As a congregation, we strive to search for meaning from the teachings of the historical Jesus, and each of us in our own way tries to understand how such teachings can lead us to develop a relationship with the divine. In my view, the Gospel of Mary provides a female perspective about Jesus. The Gospel of Mary, which can be easily located online, reveals that there was tension and jealousy amongst the apostles regarding Mary’s relationship with Jesus. In fact, there is a reference within the text suggesting that a woman’s perspective cannot be trusted. Another theme that surfaces in the text is a reference to a woman being more worthy than the apostles are. Finally, this Gnostic Gospel, in my examination, reveals a sense of jealousy on the part of the Apostles about Jesus’s relationship with Mary.
Doors
by Tricia Aynes

There are tangible doors of wood and glass that lead to our homes, our businesses, and our worship spaces, and there are doors of the mind and spirit that are every bit as real. Doors can be barriers or entryways, shutting things out or opening them up. They can imprison us or offer welcome escape. Sometimes we need to close the door to a toxic relationship in our lives so we can heal, and sometimes we need to open a door to achieve reconciliation with a beloved person so we can be whole again. Some of the most difficult decisions in life are knowing which doors to open and which ones to slam shut.

A door often sets the tone for what lies within, and it can be the gateway to adventure and mystery. In literature, a door can serve as a portal that reveals a hidden world ripe for exploring. Think of the Chronicles of Narnia, where the Pevensie children arrive in the magical land of Narnia through a wardrobe door, or Outlander, where a group of stones serve as a gateway to long-ago Scotland. And who can forget young Alice in Wonderland, who arrives in a strange new land by falling through a rabbit hole and stepping into a mirror, or Harry Potter who reaches the magical school of Hogwarts via Platform 9¾?

A good book can be a doorway into a magical world of make believe. We open its pages and our imagination is engaged right away as we are transported into an entirely new world where we are immersed in a story and a wildly different and interesting landscape.

The Bible uses door imagery many times, usually to symbolize the passage from one world to another - frequently the gateway between this world and God. It mentions doors more than 100 times, often to show communication and agreement. Open doors signify communication with God, while closed doors show a lack thereof. Here are a few Bible verses referring to doors:

- Revelation 3:20 says “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”
- Matthew 7:7-8 says “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Even from a religious viewpoint, doors are not just material pieces of wood and glass that separate one part of a building from another. They are symbolic of mental barriers we erect between ourselves and God. God invites us to open the door and let Her in.

A lot of people have closed their mental doors to God. They’ve had bad experiences with organized religion that turned them off and made them bitter. Their mental doors are sealed shut.

As we open our sanctuary doors this month to a return to two worship services, I’m wondering if we can also open the internal doors of our minds and try very hard to resist the yearning to return to “normal” - to close ourselves back up and do everything exactly as we did before the lockdown.

Instead of closing our mental doors and returning to the safety and comfort of “business as usual,” perhaps we can knock on that metaphorical door and open ourselves to new possibilities. Now that we’re opening our actual doors, let’s consider the idea of keeping our mental doors open too. Let’s start by considering new ways to “do church” and new ways to reach out to the wider community.

Yes, it can be scary to open doors because we don’t always know what’s on the other side. But the Bible offers the tantalizing possibility that it’s God on the other side, and She is just waiting for us to knock. We won’t know until we try.