Rally Day on September 12 was a big hit, with a return to two live services, our Chancel Choir, and a vibrant Ministries Fair!

There was a lot of enthusiasm as our leaders did their best to recruit new members for their wonderful ministries and committees.

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
IUCC’s Walk Team Raised Over $3,800 for AIDS Walk OC

Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah and Felicity Figueroa

“IUCC is full of Super Heroes at the AIDS Walk OC celebrating 35 years of walking and raising funds to provide services for people living with HIV and AIDS! What a great gathering! Much smaller this year and yet ever so poignant! Reminding me of the AIDS Walks of my teenage years.” - Pastor Sarah
As we begin this month of October, I’m mindful that it was just a year ago on World Communion Sunday that I preached my first sermon as your pastor. I’ve been reflecting on the year for some time now, amazed at all we accomplished in this span of life, and equally still dazed by the fact that most of it was done while in quarantine. In so many ways I feel like that gave us a strong foundation to really begin again this fall in a way that builds the excitement, because now I know that you feel we are primed to partner as we begin this second year together. We get to push the restart button as we begin again!

Last month’s worship was filled with so much joy and so much love! Beginning with our Labor Day celebration, we were reminded of our call to seek economic justice. We had such an incredible “Welcome Back Sunday” with an emphasis on what it means to love one another as we emerge as resurrection people! Heck, if we could do Christmas in July, why not Easter in September! Dear Vivian Johnson worked with me to create a very special service as we lifted up care of others and care of self in mid-September. And then we ended the month with a tradition I love and very much hope will be a new beloved IUCC favorite as well: Blessing of the Animals. So much joy in this church! The Spirit is surely among us!

As we gear up for this new year, I’m excited to share amazing news: Our team is coming together as our Ministry with Young People welcomes two amazing leaders to share their wisdom, creativity and love of children and youth!

Let me be the first to introduce you to Sally Schacht who will be our new Sunday School Coordinator! She’s spent 23 years in children and youth ministry! Educated at Whittier College with a Masters in Religion from Yale, Sally has lots of experience and a real heart for children, youth and their families. She’ll be an amazing Sunday School Coordinator to help grow our program, support and cultivate volunteers, and contribute to the life of our congregation!

Jasmine Epps is our new Youth Coordinator! She also comes with an impressive educational background and experience in youth ministry. She has both a Masters of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary and a Masters of Interdisciplinary Theology from Claremont School of Theology. She’s currently working on her Ph.D. at UCLA. As a queer womanist theologian, she will bring a unique and important perspective for our youth that is bound to rub off on the rest of us as well!

I could not be more thrilled with the addition of these two incredibly qualified women and am honored that they have decided to join our team. They and our dedicated volunteers, who have stepped up in big and small ways over the last year+, will be the perfect combo as we reboot our program.

In reality, we’re all pushing the refresh button as we reboot and renew our ministry together. We recognize it may take a while before everyone feels comfortable coming back, and we also know that church won’t look the way it always did. We don’t want to be hung up on “the way we always did it,” though we do want to learn from our past and hold on to special traditions while we are open to the new ways the Spirit moves us.

I hope you’ll consider how you can Refresh>Reboot>Renew as we look forward to deepening our bonds and commitment to ministry together. In particular, we’re looking for people who are able to help within our membership ministry, or to cultivate our online/offsite experience, and of course, to grow our family ministry. I’m very much looking forward to the work of the newly formed strategic planning task force as we seek to create a pathway to manifest our vision for IUCC in the future. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to your church. You are the reason we are who we are, and so it’s up to us to be IUCC together!

There’s some exciting programming and worship ahead for us in October with World Communion Sunday, the beginning of our Stewardship campaign, our 30 year Open and Affirming Celebration on October 17th (please don’t miss this and definitely wear your rainbows!), a celebration of IUCC’s clergy and then another of my favorites: Spooky Sunday on October 31! (Yes –please wear a costume!) This is a great way to show how much we love kids and families and also remind ourselves that we can all be young at heart! Don’t worry, there’s an important theology behind this – so be sure to come and experience it.

There’s so much to celebrate this month –please don’t miss an opportunity to deepen your faith, to grow in friendship with your IUCC family, and to outreach to new people who are so eager to catch the spirit!

In joy and gratitude,

Pastor Sarah
From the Administrative Pastor

by the Rev. Steve Swope

By the time you read this October newsletter, Comma Groups will have been formed – one or two may even have begun meeting already! But you can still get in on the Comma Group experience – sign up at iucc.org/register by Oct. 10!

Every month we’re moving closer to being fully on-site. We had wonderful presentations from Angelica Rowell at IUCC on Sept. 25 & 26, and another on Family Promise’s House of Ruth on Sept. 26. Some of our Ministries are meeting in person or in hybrid form (with a Zoom option), too.

Please remember that even if it is technically possible to record an on-site presentation, it may not always be appropriate. Some speakers prefer not to be recorded, or to control access to their image and words. And some need to be compensated, so participation in the event requires a fee.

Ken Wyant continues to lead the Tuesday Bible Study – even when he’s traveling across the country! Ken led several sessions via Zoom last month, and each week there are on-site and Zoom participants. Join in the conversation – on the book of Genesis – at 4:00 each Tuesday afternoon!

On Sunday, Oct. 10, the Green Faith Committee will host a representative of OC Clean Power, a local organization advocating for Community Choice Energy, which offers local electricity customers an alternative green source for power. Join them, right after the 11:00 service!

What else is happening? A new set of women’s book groups have started, and Diversity & Inclusion is working on several ideas. And we’re bringing back in-person adult education on Sunday mornings, with a Zoom option!

Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi and Craig Repp will re-start Sunday adult education with a 6-week series on three of the Gnostic Gospels referenced over the summer by Pastor Sarah. They’ll begin on Oct. 17 with the Gospel of Mary, and the class will start at 10:00 am (and be done in time for worship at 11:00). Watch for details, including Zoom info, in the weekly email updates!

A final note: I hope you’ve noticed the improvements in the sound of our online services, thanks to the new sound-mixer board the Administration Board approved. We’re also attempting to be as “green” as possible by inserting captions during the service for songs and other parts that ask for congregational participation.

It takes three people in the tech booth (or two really busy ones!) to make all that happen. Big thanks to Donnie Mineo for coming back to handle sound each week! And Technology Assistant Gemini Grace knows a lot and does a lot!

But everyone needs a break, and if you are interested in finding out what goes on back there, or what all that equipment does – please contact me! I’d love to have several individuals who are familiar with part of the system, who can step in when necessary. Thank you in advance!

Update on Patio Cover

Now that we are back to a full Sunday-morning schedule, many people are hoping for more shade on the Patio. It’s on its way! After many delays, the city of Irvine finally approved the permit for our new patio cover, and construction will begin soon. Please see the picture for an idea of what it will look like.

This project is the result of a major, designated contribution and a bequest. It will complete, at last, the architect’s and building committee’s design for IUCC’s campus. Thank you for your patience!

~ Steve Swope, Administrative Pastor
This year has been a financially challenging one for IUCC, and 2022 is likely to continue that trend. As we launch our stewardship campaign this month, our Fund Development Chair asked me to provide you with a brief recap of our financial situation. Here’s my best effort, created in cooperation with our IUCC Treasurer, Mark Allen.

The Early Childhood Center (ECC)
For many years, the ECC has been a big financial support to our church, even more so after we added the new administration building and remodeled the existing office space to add another room for the ECC. A key aspect of the new ECC room was to provide additional net income to cover the principal and interest (P&I) from the 2017 Cornerstone loan facility to build the new administration building. The P&I is about $44,000 a year.

Historically, the ECC had a net profit after rent of over $350,000 for the period 2013–2019. Rent was also itself about another $350,000 during this time period. These funds were largely used to build the administration building. In fact, based on year-to-date results at that point, fiscal 2020 should have been our best ECC year yet financially, as we were at full capacity and the ECC should have contributed an estimated $110,000 in net income before the impact of the pandemic, plus another $60,000 in rent.

However, we had to make the decision to close the ECC from mid-March to early July 2020 due to the pandemic, and it has struggled to regain its financial footing since reopening. The initial problem was strict regulations that kept the number of children we could enroll low. As a result, the ECC lost $165,000 in 2020. Even now that we’ve been given the go-ahead to admit more students, parents have been understandably slow to return. We have about 39-40 kids right now compared to the 63+ children we had in the past when we were at full capacity. We are anticipating a fiscal 2021 ECC net loss of $45,000 - $70,000 and likely additional ECC losses at least in the first half of 2022 and maybe into the third quarter of 2022.

A variety of measures are underway to increase enrollment. We have upped our advertising, offered enrollment incentives, and given existing parents bonuses for signing up new families. Things are slowly improving, and the ECC income varies between losing a little bit of money to breaking even in some months. Even though the ECC is nearing the break-even point, it is not yet contributing to the overall church finances as it has in the past and is not bringing in the kind of revenue that we need to support the principal and interest on the existing Cornerstone debt and programming as it has in the past.

It is critical to support the ECC until it regains its normal level of children and income. Children will return, but we just don’t know how long that will take. Therefore, forecasting exactly when the ECC will be profitable again is extremely difficult as these are unprecedented times. In the meantime, we are doing what we can to constrain our spending to maintain our overall reserve levels and keep things running smoothly.

Expenses
We’ve had some additional expenses this year, some anticipated and some not. For example, our shift to online services during the pandemic made it painfully obvious that our sound/technology system was woefully inadequate and upgrades would be necessary. We recently spent $6,000 to purchase a new sound board. We will likely need to hire a tech person soon to ensure we project a professional presence to our online community.

Within the next few months, you’ll notice work being done to replace the pergola (shaded area) outside the preschool. Fortunately, that expense has been almost fully covered by several generous donors.

Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loans
A major economic bright light has been our receipt of two PPP loans (one for $96,000 and one for nearly $172,000). While they are loans, they are also forgivable if used for authorized purposes (primarily employee payroll and benefit costs). Our Treasurer was very careful to satisfy every requirement, and the funds were forgiven for the first loan. We will put in the application for the 2nd loan to be forgiven within the next 30 days, once the final amount of the 2nd loan is spent. The funds enabled us to keep our wonderful staff paid, which was a true Godsend.

Cornerstone Line of Credit (LOC)
In December 2020, the congregation approved a $427,000 Line of Credit (LOC) from Cornerstone. The paperwork was finalized quite recently. We have the ability to “draw down” on these funds, but these funds WILL need to be repaid if borrowed. Please note that WE HAVE NOT YET TOUCHED THIS LINE OF CREDIT, except for the interest reserve and legal costs which were planned. We hope we don’t have to utilize the LOC, but it is there if needed.

Moderator’s article on finance continues on page 6
Announcing the stewardship theme for 2022
--- REFRESH>REBOOT>RENEW!

IUCC’s annual stewardship drive begins on October 10 and runs through November 7. Pastor Sarah will kick off the campaign on October 10 highlighting this year’s theme. Members and friends will receive information about the campaign and how they can pledge via email beginning October 11. Look for that email AND then either pledge online or send your pledge to the church office.

Why do we have a stewardship drive and encourage members and friends to pledge to the ongoing mission of IUCC?

- Your pledge allows IUCC leaders to plan responsibly for 2022.
- Your pledge is an outward sign of your commitment to the programs of this vital faith community.
- Your pledge is a step in IUCC becoming and being the church God is calling us to be!

Join us virtually or in person on October 10, 17, 24, 31, and November 7 as we explore together the theme -- REFRESH>REBOOT>RENEW!

Employer Retention Tax Credit (ERTC)

With the recent changes in the ERTC by Congress, we are now able to apply for these credits as well as utilize the PPP loan program. To qualify for the ERTC, we have to show a certain percent of decreased revenue from one quarter compared to the same quarter in a designated prior year. The ERTC should total almost $80,000 for fiscal 2020 and likely a larger amount for fiscal 2021. At the time we submitted the 2nd–4th Quarter 2020 paperwork in spring 2021 for the credits, after the change, we were told it could be up to a year to receive funds from the IRS. At this point, we believe that Congress will discontinue the program for 4th Quarter 2021 as of Oct 1, 2021. However, even with just the credits for the 1st-3rd Quarter for 2021, it is likely to be a sizeable amount of money but it is difficult to forecast the receipt of funds.

Congregational Contributions

We have been blessed with generous members who listened to our pleas last year and increased their pledging by 14%. Your contributions made a huge difference in our ability to maintain programs and services under very difficult circumstances. We hope you will continue to pledge as much as you are able in 2022.

Budget for 2022

Our bylaws require Ministries and Committees to develop budgets and submit them to the Admin Board to use in preparing the proposed budget. Our Treasurer has already asked these leaders to submit their budgets for 2022, advising them of the need to spend the church’s limited financial resources wisely. He will work with the Finance Committee, the Admin Board, the bookkeeper, and church staff to create a proposed budget based on available income and expense figures. Once the Admin Board has approved the proposed budget, it will be submitted to the congregation for approval at the Winter Congregational Meeting in late January 2022.

In Conclusion

We are a unique and resilient congregation who embody the mission and the vision of our beloved church. Our leaders are committed to making wise and prudent financial decisions that will keep us strong and vibrant into the future. Together, we will weather these challenges and come out even stronger than we were before. I remain confident that we are on the right course.

In hope and optimism,

Tricia Aynes, Moderator
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 distribute (candy, small toys) 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 past Trunk or Treats!
On September 3, our preschool teachers and our Child Care Committee members got together to do some cleaning, sprucing up, and organizing to accommodate the new and returning students who will start the new year in September. We enjoyed a delicious lunch and had a chance to get better acquainted! Some comments from our teachers were: “We’ve grown closer to our fellow teachers since the pandemic started.” “Everyone pitches in when needed. Miss Irma is especially helpful when we need a hand. It’s been stressful to adapt to all the changes, though. We’ve worried about our own health as well as that of the kids.” “It’s natural for kids to want to play close together, and it’s been hard to keep them socially distanced.” “We’ve needed to work extra hours to follow all the new safety rules. We’re constantly cleaning. We’ve maintained high safety standards when other schools haven’t – more than is required.” “We’ve been moving classrooms around to allow for age groups that have greater enrollment.” It was a great day!
The **Neighbors in Need offering**, which we will receive on **October 3, 2021**, supports the UCC’s ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries to fund a wide array of local and national justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects. Through ucc.org/justice, our national Justice and Witness Ministries office offers resources, news updates, and action alerts on a broad spectrum of justice issues. Working with members of the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (a network of thousands of UCC justice and peace advocates), Justice and Witness continues its strong policy advocacy work on issues such as the federal budget, voting rights, immigration, health care, hate crimes, civil liberties, and environmental justice.

Neighbors in Need also supports our American Indian neighbors in the UCC. One-third of the offering supports the UCC’s Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM). Historically, forebears of the UCC established churches and worked with Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Mandan, Hidatsa, Arickara, and Hocak in North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and northern Nebraska. Today there are 20 UCC congregations on reservations and one urban, multiracial UCC congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota. These churches and their pastors are supported by CAIM. CAIM is also an invaluable resource for more than 1,000 individuals from dozens of other tribes and nations who are members of other UCC congregations in the U.S.

You may bring your offering to church on October 3rd or any time during the month. Checks should be made out to IUCC with NIN on the memo line. Of course, you can also donate online at iucc.org, indicating NIN.

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**Family Promise of Orange County**

Cyndee Albertson, Exec. Director of Family Promise, spoke to a small group of IUCC folks after church on Sunday, 9/26. While bringing us up to date on the House of Ruth project, she also shared information from FP’s Annual Report. In 2020 a total of 269 people were served (65 families). Over 2,000 nights of shelter were provided. One of the crucial roles that FP played during Covid was to help maintain the families who have “graduated” from their program into permanent housing. Many of those parents lost jobs, had car problems and other financial issues that threatened their housing. 100% of those families were able to retain their housing, thanks to the support provided by FP.

The Family Promise Gala will be held on Saturday, October 23rd at The Villa, 510 E Katella Ave, Orange. Supporters of FP will come together in-person and online to help end family homelessness. A cocktail reception will begin at 5:00 pm; YouTube Live starts at 5:45; and the program begins at 6:00 pm. Click on this link to view the registration site: [https://one.bidpal.net/fpop Gala/ticketing(details:ticketing-summary)](https://one.bidpal.net/fpop Gala/ticketing(details:ticketing-summary)). The tickets are quite expensive, but you can register for a Virtual Ticket at no charge. You’ll be able to see the Silent Auction items starting on October 17 and join in the virtual program on the 23rd. The auction items always range from delightful small offerings to fabulous vacation stays!

~~Sharon Lynn, Co-Chair, Mission & Service~~
Diversity & Inclusion Ministry Events

Cross-Cultural Dinners

Last month’s Vietnamese dinner at Pho So 1 in Irvine
Photo by Tricia Aynes

We continue our series of restaurant outings as a means to get to know the wide variety of cultures represented in Orange County. Last month, over twenty of us enjoyed delicious Vietnamese cuisine at Pho So 1 in the Westpark Plaza. What made it extra special was hearing from the owner, Kacy Le. Her story of hard work and determination was inspiring. She graciously answered a number of questions from the group about her story, the food, and a bit about her cultural background.

We are making it a priority to select locations that have outdoor dining available so that all may feel secure in enjoying the food, fellowship, and a little education. We have other restaurants in mind for the coming months and welcome your input as well.

October offers us a different opportunity, as we are going to the Irvine Global Village Festival at the Great Park. The event runs from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on October 9. (https://www.cityofirvine.org/irvine-global-village-festival) There are more food and culture options at this event than I could begin to highlight. Mary and I have been enjoying this one-day festival for many years now and it never disappoints. The Great Park location is better for those with mobility issues than the former location at Barber Park. It’s the sort of event where people can wander about as they like, but we aim to meet at 4:00 p.m. at the Palm Court. Hoping to see you there! Contact Craig Repp with questions: craigrepp@gmail.com

~ Craig Repp

Guest Speaker: Dr. Jessica Aya Alabi

Do you wonder what “Critical Race Theory” really is and what the fuss is all about? Have you heard someone criticize Ethnic Studies as divisive or unnecessary? Then Diversity & Inclusion’s next speaker is for you!

Dr. Jessica Ayo Alabi, Chair of the Department of Sociology, Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, and Social Justice Studies at Orange Coast College will explain the importance of Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory – not only for California college students, but for an understanding of contemporary American politics and society.

Join the Diversity & Inclusion Ministry to hear Dr. Alabi address this important topic:

Sunday, Oct. 24 meeting – 12:30 p.m. on Zoom
Meeting ID: 896 7601 8207; Passcode: 051767

This interactive presentation is designed to address the following questions and topics:

• What does Ethnic Studies entail, and why is it important as an integral part of pre-collegiate and collegiate education?
• CSU and Community College Ethnic Studies Requirements.
• What are the reasons people are either in favor of or against Ethnic Studies?
• Discussion of pros and cons of Ethnic Studies.
• What is Critical Race Theory?
• How do we challenge the resistance to Critical Race Theory?
• Possible arguments or strategies in support of Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory that one can use in reaching out to School Boards and elected representatives.
Hello IUCC family! Some of you may have heard about Moment of Reflection and others might be hearing about it for the first time. I would like to take this opportunity to provide information with regards to this new ‘group.’ During the pandemic, coffee hour has been hosted via Zoom and there has always been a reasonable attendance as it was a way for people to connect and share their thoughts post-service. While I am excited that we are comfortable enough to have hybrid services, it has caused a new set of complications, mainly the method in which we all share. Many people have returned to socializing on the patio (masked) after service, but we still have an online community of people who are unable to attend in person or would rather not at this time. These individuals are important too, and they need a method to connect with those who have attended service in person. Moment of Reflection is intended to be that method.

Moment of Reflection is a Facebook group where the sole purpose is to provide one location where individuals can take a moment out of their day and reflect on the service. Since it is a Facebook group, you can post at ANY time. I strongly encourage everyone who can, even if you attend the in-person service, to join Moment of Reflection and post a few lines of what you thought or maybe how you feel now about the service after talking to people on the patio. Remember, you are doing this so those who weren’t able to connect in person and read your thoughts and connect through the power of words.

Now let’s talk about when the coffee will be coming back. The answer is still that I do not know. Once the congregation (including the admin board) expresses that they feel 100% comfortable with people from different households standing very close together, with their masks off, consuming beverages prepared by one person, at a table touched by everyone, then that is when coffee hour will come back. While the church is essentially vaccinated, breakthrough infections are a thing. Coffee hour will come back, when? That is up to you (and the admin board).

Don’t forget to join Moment of Reflection (https://www.facebook.com/groups/MomentofReflection). If you do not have a Facebook but still want to share your reflection on the day’s service, just email me jalexingaliucc@gmail.com and I will post it on your behalf. Just make sure you include the name of who to credit the reflection to.

Thank you!
J. Alex Ingal, Hospitality Chair
What a sweet, comforting, and heart-warming afternoon it was at IUCC when Pastor Sarah blessed nine dogs, a skink, a frog and a tadpole! All the critters were well behaved, and their owners were appreciative. She even blessed a couple of beloved pets who had passed away. Pastor Sarah started this wonderful tradition at her previous church, and we’re hoping it catches on and becomes an annual tradition here at IUCC!
Sunday, October 10 at 12:30 following second service

Join us for a presentation by Ayn Craciun, Policy Advocate for Climate Action Campaign.

While the world was slowed by the pandemic, climate activists stayed busy advocating for change. A few significant wins occurred in Orange County in 2020-2021. Ayn will update us on the latest status of Community Choice Energy (CCE), adopted last year by Irvine, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, and Buena Park. She will also update us on the status of other OC cities joining CCE. For those not familiar, CCE provides electricity derived from sustainable clean energy sources.

Many possibly have not heard of the Orange County Power Authority (OCPA). It was formed last year to manage the new alternate power source. Residents of the above cities will soon have an important choice to change their power from Southern California Edison to electricity derived from cleaner energy. These changes are not without controversy as has been reported lately in the news. Ayn will provide an assessment of some of the early challenges, who is the OCPA, how it is governed and funded, and actions local citizen groups are taking to ensure its success.

Also learn about another big win: In August, Irvine became the first city in Southern California to set a goal of achieving a zero-carbon local economy by 2030 consistent with the targets set by climate science. IUCC Green Faith actively advocated for the Irvine ACHIEVES resolution at the city council. In addition, important commitments were secured for equity and justice. The Irvine ACHIEVES resolution outlines how the city will strive to ensure environmental, economic, and social justice as it works to slash emissions through climate programs and policies. As we know at IUCC, while the climate crisis affects all of us, it impacts low-income families and communities of color first and worst.

~ Chuck Heath

What an absolute joy it was to hear the choir singing again in our amazing sanctuary! The love and the passion for music was palpable, and I am so grateful that through our precautions and PPE we can be together again...in person...voice-to-voice. We also welcomed our new and wonderful accompanist Yuyoung Jeong to our church family, as well as two new interns, Jocelyne and Wendy, and our returning tenor extraordinaire Jaime.

Please mark your calendar for Sunday, December 5, at 7 p.m. for our December Christmas Concert “Home for the Holidays” where we will sing a good number of familiar songs and carols interspersed with short readings about how much fun it is to be together again at Christmas.

In Love and Spirit,

Chris Peterson
For a few months now we’ve been considering various factors that contribute to “resiliency” in successfully managing challenges to well-being, including stress, crisis, and trauma. Depending on the individual child/teen, the pandemic has contained at least some elements of each of these for all of us, adults and children alike.

As we’ve been discussing, how well adults in a child’s life handle these challenges has a lot to do with how well children around them do. We’ve discussed both external and internal contributors to resiliency. Last month we introduced the concept of “Basic Needs” and the extent to which (how well or how poorly) these needs are being met can influence the individual strengths and weaknesses a particular child or young person brings to meeting disruptions to routine living.

The Six Basic Needs, which we listed last time (Survival; Safety and Security; Belonging; Love; Self-Esteem; Self-Actualization) are related to each other in significant ways. First, the needs are “hierarchical” – that is, whether or not an early need is met well will influence how well needs further up in the hierarchy can be met. The needs also progress in levels of sophistication, and are related to experiences, and not to age. We’ll visit this idea again when we wrap up. Progression through the six levels of human needs is also not assured, and many people get “stuck” at a particular level if the need is not being met. These two concepts help to explain how the pandemic crisis has affected different families and different individuals very differently.

The most basic human need – level one – is survival. That is, without food, water, and cover (protection from the elements), nothing else really matters. People in extreme poverty or in dangerous situations function at this level almost exclusively, as do people with life threatening illnesses, people in war, etc. With this in mind, it is apparent how differently children will have experienced the pandemic depending on their level of financial security. Being “very well off” financially puts individuals in a position of extreme privilege when survival needs are threatened. People who kept their jobs and were able to provide for their families as usual have children who did not have to “worry” about the basics of survival. Children living in families when parents lost their jobs, and thus their ability to provide food, heat, gas for the car, rent/mortgage and other necessities live with children feeling very worried and unbalanced as their life situation drastically changed. Watching and hearing parents stress, talk (or fight) about money, jobs or housing, having less or different kinds of food cause children to experience anxiety and feeling very unsettled. It is important to share your realities with them; information is always settling for anxiety.

Finally, and this is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the current health crisis for parents to acknowledge - children and teens have been overly exposed to death for the past many months. They have heard the numbers of deaths reported daily on the television. They have seen coffins piling up near hospitals and coming home from overseas carrying bodies of soldiers. They have heard the words about “protection from serious illness and death” repeated daily. Yes my friends, it’s time to talk to children about death. Your own fears may make this more difficult, but leaving children alone to deal with the mystery of death when it is a daily topic of discussion is cruel. It is time to acknowledge, with them, that nobody alive really knows about death, but that most people have a theory. These theories are often grounded in various religious teachings and faiths. It’s time to share your faith and what it says about death with your children.

_Staying alive is the most basic need._ For almost two years the whole world has been saying: “don’t count on it.” Whether or not your family has lost someone to death from the virus, children know that other families have. Talk with them. Please. It will hopefully be reassuring to know that you don’t have to know exactly what to say or exactly how to say it. Your explanation will not be graded! But it is urgent, and kind, that you say something. And please don’t lie: dead people are not sleeping. Children need to trust you to tell them the truth, about everything. Even something you’re not sure about. Tell them your truth, or share your doubts. Just don’t leave them alone.

Feed them, and be honest about having to change the meal plans if money is short. Put extra sweaters and blankets on them if you’ve cut down on the heat. Let them see you look for work if you’ve lost your job. Most importantly, let them know how much they matter to you and how nothing is more important to you than keeping them as comfortable as you can. Let them ask questions. Tell them every day, until this time of threat and danger has passed, that you will take care of them. Tell them you will do the worrying, so they don’t have to.
I was standing by the sink when my five-year-old patted my hip with her dimpled hand, still sticky from breakfast. “I’ll play with you, Mama,” she said through pink lips that were circled by milk. Her earnest and welcoming eyes spoke of her desire to be my playmate. In her cleverness, she offered herself to me for, surely, I must be yearning for a playmate too.

Some of the most welcome words my daughter could hear were that someone wanted to play with her. What a compliment that she bestowed such words on me. I don’t recall how I responded; I hope I didn’t brush her off by claiming my busyness.

Thinking back on those sweet words, I’m trying to get at the essence of why they touched a tender spot deep within me. She didn’t ask, “Do you want to play?” or “Will you play with me?” There was a poignancy in her stating “I’ll play with you, Mama.” Were her words especially tender because she didn’t sulk or claim that nobody wanted to play with her? Instead, she took the initiative and reached out to somebody. Did my heart melt because she was offering the gift of herself?

Oh, the beauty of the forthrightness of a child. Adults have times when we would welcome the presence of a friend, a playmate if you will. Presence is a present. I’ve called someone and asked, “Would you like to go out to lunch? A movie? A walk?” The question is somehow different from the definitive statement, “I’ll go for a walk with you.” (I’ll play with you.) Such a statement infers a confidence in knowing that person will want to be with you, therefore it is safe to offer the company of yourself to them. It also suggests that you know the person would welcome dropping their work to play with you because you take precedence over their work.

In my musings about “I’ll play with you, Mama,” I still haven’t reached an understanding that satisfies me. Perhaps the core reason I’m still so moved by it is because it was spoken by a little person in pink pajamas and tousled hair whom I loved to the depths of the sea, to the width of the globe, and to the stars and back.
The Gospel of Judas (Tchacos Codex) is a non-canonical Gnostic gospel consisting of conversations between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. This text is thought to have been composed in the late 2nd-century. This is a complex gospel that contains an abundance of cosmological narratives making it difficult to provide a deep and comprehensive examination in a short newsletter article. However, an idea the writer of the Gospel of Judas reveals is that God does not desire suffering and death. The writer suggests that the idea about suffering and death occurs because world rulers and those who follow them have gone astray.

In contrast to the Canonical gospels, which portray Judas as a betrayer who delivered Jesus to the authorities for crucifixion in exchange for money, the Gospel of Judas portrays Judas’s actions as being carried out in obedience to instructions given to him by Jesus. The writer of the Gospel of Judas asserts that, not Judas Iscariot, but rather the other disciples had not learned the true Gospel, which Jesus taught only to Judas Iscariot. In looking at the canonical Gospels, one can find a link between the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of Judas. This link, in my opinion, is grounded upon the narrative that Jesus is teaching that the present world is about to be destroyed, along with all who worship the demonic powers who are in control. The Book of Revelation and the Gospel of Judas suggests that in the end only believers will be saved.

It is Judas, according to this Gnostic Gospel, who is singled out as Jesus’s greatest disciple. He alone is able to receive Jesus’s most profound teaching and revelation. The text reveals that Jesus laughs at the other disciples’ prayers and sacrifices. According to the writer of the Gospel of Judas, the disciples do not fully grasp who Jesus really is and from where he has come. A fair amount of the Gospel of Judas is filled with Jesus’s teachings about spiritual life.

Judas to have written it and hence the author remains anonymous. The Gospel of Judas is important in terms of understanding the history of Christianity because Christianity was developing and it was not clear whose views would be dominant. As progressive Christians, I believe that the Gospel of Judas offers us a perspective that differs from the traditional history of Christianity.

Finally, in reference to the Gospel of Judas, I believe that as progressive Christians in our various journeys there is much to be learned by contemplating “other voices.” One way to grow spiritually is to be open to explore the idea of tasting everything and yet swallowing nothing.

Reference
Negative African-American stereotypes permeate our society and are manifested in many ways, including television, movies, books, and public discourse. Black men have been caricatured on a spectrum that goes from a mindless character to a dangerous, bestial being. This latter characterization is a major factor in 1,000 Black men being killed by the police last year in the U.S. Black women have to endure many negative stereotypes as well, such as being perceived as domineering or exceptionally strong.

What is it like to be African-American in America and to be African-American in Orange County? Lesli Mitchell projects a calmness and peacefulness, a strong sense of self, with a creative inner child and eyes that are expressive.

All people of color have to navigate the dehumanizing power of White supremacy. Because of White supremacy and White privilege, racial dynamics are complicated and can have a gnawing psychological impact on people of color - in different ways. Although Lesli learned from her parents to educate herself about African-American history and try to rise above the fray and understand racism, she is not free from the power of Black stereotypes.

Lesli grew up in Los Angeles in a predominately African-American neighborhood. Because of racism, she was sometimes put on a pedestal for having relatively lighter skin and wavier hair. Sometimes she was ostracized for having a White mom and not being quite “Black enough.” Lesli lived in a community with a collective unity of racial strength and pride, now called “Black Beverly Hills.” Her neighbors were African-American scientists, lawyers, federal judges, professors, doctors and performers like the O’Jays and Debbie Allen. Because of racism, Lesli’s parents were selective with their associations at their place of employment, and elsewhere, never knowing who might say something inappropriate or offensive.

Lesli is comfortable with her dual racial self-identity as a Black woman and as a mixed-race woman. She actually feels like her identity has enriched her life and her perspective. Primarily guided by her father, Lesli and her siblings were raised to consider themselves “Black.” In college, Lesli began thinking deeper about her dual racial identity and wrote a paper where she explored the cultural influence of having a White mother, and how that impacted her world perspective. Initially, her father seemed annoyed about Lesli exploring her bi-racial identity. He worried that this exploration might detract from her pride in being “Black,” and potentially, her desire to fight against racism. Her father grew up in the segregated south as a child, and in college he had witnessed lighter skinned African-American people pass for white and disassociate themselves from the African-American community in an attempt to gain higher racial social status. Lesli’s father had a strong sense of pride in the African-American’s struggle, especially their contribution to the civil rights movement and their fight for social justice. Lesli assured her father that exploring her bi-racial identity did not mean that she was not comfortable with her “Black” identity. Lesli explained to her father that she needed to explore and be familiar with all parts of her cultural heritage - in order to be grounded as a person. He was able to understand this.

Eventually, racism rears its ugly head in real life. Racism is a felt experience in the lives of many people of color, and it is painful. Lesli’s earliest experience with racism was with her White grandfather, who offered to pay her father not to marry her mother. Lesli’s grandfather expressed his fear to Lesli’s mother that “All Black men are drug addicts.”

Lesli Mitchell: A Black, Bi-Racial Woman Living in America, Living in Orange County
by The Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge
Member, Diversity & Inclusion Ministry and Member, Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry

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The fear, of course, was also that her mother would have mixed-race children, and they would not be of respectable social stock. Her White grandfather mostly kept to a “visit once a year for an hour” distance from his grandchildren. That is what racism looks like - it manifests as missed opportunities, missed connections, desperate alignments with privilege/power, abandonment, objectification, disrespect, loss, dehumanization - and so much more. Luckily, Lesli’s White grandmother did not agree with her grandfather’s perspective, but her grandfather’s bias was felt much stronger.

Lesli has been married to Ernie, who is African-American, for close to 20 years. Ernie also grew up in an African-American community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Lesli is an LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) psychotherapist, artist and entrepreneur. Ernie is a sales manager for a major networking company, music lover, and has three successful Live 365 online radio stations, “Funkology,” “Soul Source” and “Jazz Fusion.” Her 17 year-old daughter, Ava, is a “great kid,” “super smart” and a guitarist who writes and plays her own songs. Lesli, Ernie and their daughter are close, having frequent conversations about everything under the sun.

Raising an African-American child in Orange County has had its pros and cons. The weather is amazing, the mountains and beaches are gorgeous, and it is a relatively safe, family-friendly place to live. Like anywhere, Ava has had to learn how to vet people and what real friendship looks and feels like. Often being the “only” African-American child in her class or neighborhood, she has had to learn which friends were willing to learn what is racially appropriate and what is not. For instance, certain friends needed to learn not to touch her hair frequently nor use certain words that Ava found offensive. In most cases she has had good experiences, but she has also some negative experiences where other kids or adults were racially insensitive and/or dismissive about her feelings. With regards to race, physical characteristics have also been a factor. For instance, facial features, eye color, hair texture, skin color have come up, with inappropriate comments being made that needed to be discussed. Ava has always had her parents to help her process feelings and thoughts.

Lesli has found Orange County to be a place that feels a bit insulated at times. It seems like people don’t always explore much outside of their area. Lesli realizes that this could be perceived as stereo-type, but at times OC feels like its own little planet. When Lesli was a little girl growing up in Los Angeles, her White mother took her three mixed-race children to Laguna Beach to a local popular diner to eat. A man was sitting at the bar stool repeatedly said the “N-word” to Lesli’s family. Her mother let the manager know and the man was asked to leave. Lesli’s family left the diner and proceeded back to their hotel, feeling terrified, sad and angry. As a stay-at-home mom in Orange County for 15 years, Lesli regularly heard “Oh no, we don’t go to go to LA. That’s where the gangs are.” One of the consequences of this thought process is that people don’t get exposed enough to different groups and tend to live in more homogenous circles. For example, when Ava was 4 years old and in preschool, Lesli recalls her preschool teacher using the word “colored” to refer to African-Americans, and then immediately looked embarrassed and said “I mean African-American.” Lesli was shocked that the teacher used such an outdated word. It made her wonder if she knew any African-Americans. Lesli had similar situations at Ava’s elementary school. When Ava was in first grade, the teacher showed inappropriate content for Black History Month. Lesli learned that all of the teachers at the school had been showing this video to all of the kids from K-5th for several years. The video, “Our Friend Martin,” showed real footage of African-American men being attacked by German Shepard dogs and police officers using fire hoses on entire African-American families during civil rights demonstrations. When Lesli complained to the teacher and the principal regarding the content for this age group and shared with them that Ava was afraid that her family would also be attacked, the teachers and the principal were baffled by her concerns, minimized her feelings and were very reluctant to stop showing the film.

Lesli’s family has experienced several incidents in Orange County that were likely inspired by racism. For instance, Lesli’s family once had their toilet seat broken in half by a plumber that came to work on their bathroom drain. He left their residence before they noticed the damage. He left their residence before they noticed the damage. Another incident was a dryer repairman who intentionally scraped multiple deep, huge lines with a brick onto Ernie’s brand new BMW while he was in the garage working on the appliance. Lesli’s entire family has frequently had strange, uncomfortable encounters that they experienced as racial slights. Lesli’s family has had good experiences and toxic experiences in Orange County.

Three progressive Black women created Black Lives Matter after the death of Trayvon Martin. They are Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors, and Opel Tometi. Lesli thinks that Black Lives Matter is “great because it helps us all to be aware of what is happening in our world and challenges us to come up with better solutions.” Lesli thinks that there needs to be more awareness and education about the history of African-Americans and other marginalized groups. She believes that we should understand how our society has
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been systematically shaped by the history of race relations. We all hold stereotypical bias around race, gender, sexuality, class and other groups. We all need to learn about how these biases are embedded in our psyche and social systems, so that we can begin to intentionally get rid of them. If we don’t know about it or don’t understand it, we can’t work on it.

Lesli gives some examples of systemic bias regarding African-Americans. An article from PNAS notes “false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites continue to shape the way we perceive and treat black people.” (Racial Bias In Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences Between Whites and Blacks, from www.pnas.org) Myths that Black people have thicker skin and feel less pain drive inadequate pain management. Black people reporting pain tend to be 22% less likely to be prescribed pain medications. In addition, African-American women are significantly underdiagnosed for breast cancer in comparison to White women, but Black women are more likely to die from it, according to the CDC. The CDC explains that doctors are more likely to find breast cancer at an earlier stage among White women than they do for Black women. (https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/research/articles/breast_cancer_rates_women.htm)

Systemic bias shows up in so many other areas of our society. For instance, African-Americans are given significantly longer sentences for the same crime. In education, African-American students are tested significantly less for gifted services, are expected less of academically and are suspended in schools for the same infractions as White children who are not suspended. For example, while Black children are overrepresented in practices that exclude or remove students from school, White children are underrepresented. Such data are clear evidence that racism and bias often drive exclusionary practices. To ignore this is to preserve the status quo. If the numbers aren’t enough to show that discrimination exists in American classrooms, Studies have shown that Black children do not misbehave more than their White peers, rather they are punished more. In fact, Black students are more likely than their White peers to receive a disciplinary action for a discretionary offense like talking back, violating a dress code, or being defiant. Black children are also more likely to be suspended out of school for their first offense.”

Systemic discrimination shows up in the area of hair grooming as well. Having coily hair, Lesli has become very interested in learning about the history of African-American hair. A great book on hair is “Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America,” by Ayana Byrd. Lesli has learned that both Black men and women regularly experience discrimination regarding their hair, in schools and in the workplace. Hair has a special cultural value for African-Americans. Of all ethnic groups, African and African-American hair is some of the most unique hair on the planet. In addition to symbolizing pride, racial identity, freedom, unity, bonding, and empowerment, Black hair has an additional unique history. Caring for it has historically enabled African-Americans to develop more independence and entrepreneurship in a racist society. Constantly confronted with “White Only” signs and excluded in the marketplace, African-American hair salons and barber shops became community centers of support, sharing, and socialization, further contributing to African-American pride. Black hair has been a part of black protests, evidenced by the large afros worn by many African-Americans as well as some of the Black Panthers, during the civil rights movement. Black hair has been an important factor in such Black icons as Diana Ross, Beyoncé, Bob Marley, and Whoopi Goldberg. Interestingly, dreadlocks and braids are popular with some White women.

Not being educated about personal bias and systemic bias is very disempowering for all of us as a society. Although the statement “I am colorblind” often has positive intentions, ultimately it absolves the person from the responsibility of acknowledging systemic racism and ultimately helping to work on a solution to make things better. Loretta Ross states that the expression “I don’t have any prejudice” is the language of White supremacy.

Lesli mentions WEB Du Bois,* who taught sociology at Atlanta University and conducted research for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. He wrote The Soul of Black Folk, introducing the concept of “double consciousness.” This concept describes a common experience for African-Americans and possibly other people of color. African-Americans often experience the world through two lenses. The first lens is actual self-identity, how one feels and knows who they are. The second lens is one’s awareness of how they are perceived/ stereotyped by society. Some of the stress of racism occurs at this juncture, having to balance this dual awareness. Lesli states that it is not possible to escape racial stereotypes. They are always lurking in the back of her consciousness. An African-American person may be solid in their personal identity, but always present is the awareness of the possibility that others might perceive them through a racialized lens. It is tiring to be in one’s own existence while simultaneously having to be aware of or prepared for racial stereotypes.

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Lesli mentions that these problems exist because of slavery. I would like to add that we are not talking about slavery that existed 400 years ago, but that slavery that still exists today, because of the shackles of racial stereotypes and discrimination.

Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black American law professor, who created the term in 1989. She explains feminist intersectionality as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.” In a recent interview with Time, she states “All inequality is not created equal.” An intersectional approach shows the way that people’s social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination. Such factors as race, gender, education, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and physical ability can all interact with each other, with the sum being greater than the parts.

Lesli has helped me better understand the meaning of intersectionality in terms of compounding discrimination factors in her life. Lesli juggles her racial identity as African-American, as bi-racial and as a woman. Her experience as an African-American and bi-racial female is a compounded identity where she often experiences the intersection of race and gender simultaneously. When Lesli was at UC Berkeley, she went to her advisor, expressing interest in writing an honors thesis on bi-racial identity. For context, Lesli had a 3.7 GPA. The advisor was a White woman. She proceeded to discourage Lesli from writing her honors thesis, saying, “You really have to be a good writer to write an honors thesis...I don’t know...” Lesli’s advisor had no clue regarding Lesli’s writing ability and had low expectations of her, despite a high GPA. In this situation, her perception of Lesli could have been a combination of racism and sexism combined. Lesli’s sister has a daughter who was placed in an average reading group at school in the first grade, when she clearly was a gifted reader. This could have been a compounded discrimination of racism and sexism combined. Assumptions have been made about Lesli as a student, with lower expectations, that were likely a result of the combination of racism and sexism. However, Lesli also experiences these identities as great gifts. As a psychotherapist and social worker, she has an awareness of society from a certain vantage point, which has brought her great insight, understanding of herself and others, of human nature and society.

Lesli enjoys being creative. She likes to paint and write children’s books. She has also created a kit for psychotherapists that includes a small storyboard to facilitate the therapy process. She is a strong feminist who has a soft voice and a gentle manner. She is animated when she talks. Her eyes are expressive. From flickers of her inner child, I can see why she writes children’s books.

Lesli tells me that David Bowie is one of her heroes. She likes his lyrics/music and that he has continued to re-invent himself over his lifetime. Lesli feels that we all have the right to explore and grow and not let anyone get in the way of this birthright. Lesli appreciates that he got sober, married a woman from Somalia, Africa, and had a mixed-race child, which is a sign of someone that can be cross-cultural, which she thinks is amazing. She appreciates artistic creativity, noting that he even used his creativity for a deathbed video. Another hero she appreciates is Malcolm X, who went from a place of hate, on an excruciating personal journey, to one of love and growth. She appreciates this as a psychotherapist -that is real work and it is sometimes ugly, but it is authentic.

Lesli and her parents worked hard to build a strong resistance to being defined by something outside themselves – Black stereotypes. They worked hard to rise above society’s toxicity, but they were still impacted by it. They were intellectually clear that the problems were with society’s perception of African-Americans and not with African-American people per se. This provided some protection, but not complete protection. It can be exhausting to contend with the constancy of racism because that toxic energy is at odds with a person’s desire to generate their own sense of self. For people of color, this is not an easy task. Unfortunately, many people of color also have to battle their own internalized racism, where they internalize societies’ racist stereotypes against themselves. It is hard to escape the power of White supremacy, White privilege, and structural racism, the engines that drive African-American stereotypes and discrimination. Knowledge is power. Lesli is lucky that both her parents and maternal and paternal grandparents were all college-educated. Will Lesli ultimately win her battle against double consciousness? With her intellect, knowledge, strong personality, centered sense of self, and resolve, she is well-prepared for battle. When long-time racial and reproductive activist, Loretta Ross, was asked if she thought racial justice would one day be achieved, she replied that she wouldn’t have been an activist for 50 years if she didn’t believe in ultimate success. My bet is with Loretta and Lesli.

* It is a bitter irony that Du Bois’ son, Burghardt, died from diphtheria in 1899, because of the basis for dual consciousness. Du Bois was unable to find one of three Black doctors in Atlanta to treat his son. None of the White doctors were willing to take his son as a patient because he was Black, therefore, not fully human, a Black stereotype.