On February 27, we held the tension of war while still celebrating Fat Sunday with a joyous service of song and light!

August Lobato was a fabulous worship leader!

Above & below: Our magnificent Chancel Choir provided lots of rollicking and fun-filled music for Fat Sunday

Pastor Sarah preached on the importance of joy

Left and right: Recipients who found a “baby” inside their mini Kings cakes (baked by Alex Ingal). Middle: Pastor Sarah shows off her talent for flipping pancakes!
Later that same day, IUCC members gathered at Alton & Culver for a candlelight vigil in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

We stood together in support of the Ukrainian people and to promote peace. We got lots of honks of support!

*Photos on pages 1 & 2 courtesy of Tricia Aynes*
We enter into the season of Lent with a heaviness as we bear the weight of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Perhaps the season of Lent is always heavy as it reminds us that we are journeying towards the cross. There is only one way to get to Easter. And yet, as we ended the month of February we did so mindful that we have to hold both the heavy and the light. We have to be both focused on seeking justice and open to embracing joy. It’s a complicated balance, because it’s so easy to land on one side or the other - but life calls us to both. We cannot be so consumed that we fail to see the light, the beauty, the grace and the joy. But we also cannot live so much in our own little bubble of privilege that we fail to see the hurting injustices of our world. And so we enter into this season, mindful of the pain in our world, but ever so aware of the promise of Easter, and the choice of happiness.

As I reflect upon our last month together, I can’t help but feel happy and proud. We are continuing to emerge from the pandemic, and there was a lot of rejoicing as we emerged from the post-omicron surge. While February was the shortest of months, we sure did manage to pack a lot into it! We celebrated Black History month with beautiful musical offerings each week, and our own Rev. Dr. Jerry Von Talge offered us a reflection on his own journey with racism, learning how to become more anti-racist as a member of our Diversity and Inclusion Ministry. D&I then hosted a wonderful discussion on Intersectionality: Gender, Race and Sexuality on the final Sunday of February. We held our first Evolution Sunday with Dr. Kathleen Treseder, Evolutionary Biologist, who taught us that fungi are actually fun, and more importantly, incredibly instrumental to study in order to learn about adaptation or evolution through climate change.

The last Sunday of February really summed up who our church is for me. We are people who recognize our call to seek justice, and people who recognize God’s kin-dom come, recognizing the interconnection of the human family and the delight that comes in celebrating together. The music was incredible, the joy infectious. From the King’s Cake to the pancake runs, the bright gold, green, and purple, and the beads around our necks, there was so much to celebrate. And yet we know that we cannot ignore the pain - so we held the tension, we balanced our worry and fear with the levity of the moment knowing that both can exist. It felt right to gather together at our little corner of the world later that day on Alton and Culver and join a global demonstration for peace. This is who we are as progressive Christians - Both/And: Complex thinking feeling, acting followers of Jesus who seek a humble path to peace with joyful hearts of gratitude.

And so what better way for us to prepare ourselves for Lent? We carry all of this with us as we enter into this season. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our journey as the smudge of soot marks our skin, reminding us of our earthly journeys from dust to dust. I do hope you’ll join in this contemplative experience. It offers a quiet calm to balance the energy of Sunday’s jubilation. There’s something about the light and shadow that is a physical reminder to me of not just our Lenten Journey, but our life’s journey.

This Lenten Season I’ll be reflecting on what it means to be Progressive Christians using Bishop Spong’s final book “Unbelievable” as a guide. I hope this will be a time for us to contemplate our faith and that you’ll consider entering the conversation by joining the Rev. Bil Aulenbach and me in our weekly discussions on Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings in person at the church and online. The sermon is enough to launch the conversation, but I encourage you to read along in the book study. Bishop Spong died last September. For many of us, he was the father of Progressive Christianity and our gateway into a new understanding of what it means to follow Jesus in the 21st century. Fr. Bil and I had such a great time last fall in our progressive Christian study it seemed fitting to take this time to expand the conversation to the entire congregation and supplement it with another study together. Please join us!

Friends, as the world continues to shift around us, and we try to find our footing amidst the fear of World War III and what we hope is the ending of a pandemic, I hope that you will find comfort, challenge, joy, and love in your church family. We continue to seek relevance in our lives and to be relevant as a church. We’re treading on ground that hasn’t been walked before. May we find comfort in the familiarity of our ritual, the challenge of the season, and the hope of Easter. It is my prayer that in our coming together we are energized by the Spirit so that we can not just face another day, but fully live into our future, revitalized by our community of faith.

Yours along the Journey,

Pastor Sarah
The season of Lent has come, and Pastor Sarah has prepared not only a new sermon series but an adult study opportunity around it! The sermon series is “A Living Faith,” based on ideas from the late Bishop Spong’s final book, Unbelievable.

And each week Pastor Sarah and Fr. Bil Aulenbach will lead discussions on the topics from her sermons, on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 or Thursday mornings at 9:30. Be sure to join them for some challenging and inspiring conversations!

Have YOU signed up to hear Prof. Philip Jenkins yet? The Economist magazine called him “one of America’s best scholars of religion”! His latest book addresses issues of climate change and its consequences, and that’s the subject of Jenkins’ March 19 talk – “Climate, Catastrophe & Faith.”

His second lecture, on March 26, will be “The Lost Gospels: Myths & Realities,” based on an earlier book, The Many Faces of Christ. Both talks will begin at 10:00 am – only on Zoom!

You must sign up in advance, at www.iucc.org/register - $10 for one lecture or just $15 for both. Do it today, so we can continue offering quality speakers and challenging ideas at IUCC!

Ken Wyant’s Tuesday Bible Study is coming to the end of the book of Genesis. Next topic? The book of Job and the minor prophets are possibilities...join them on Tuesdays – online or at IUCC– at 4 pm to find out!

This coming Sunday, March 6, there will be NO adult Sunday school at 10 a.m. But come back on March 13 for a special To-Be-Announced discussion!

And on March 20, Bil Aulenbach will start a 4-week DVD series by Bart Ehrman - “From Jesus to Constantine: A History of Early Christianity.”

Comma Groups are continuing to read and discuss selections from contemporary blogs. March and April are the final months of gathering for this year.

And don’t forget Scott Bollens’ book event on Saturday, March 12 at 7:00 pm! Scott wrote two books in 2021 – one an academic work and the other fiction. He’ll be talking about common themes between them, and you’ll be able to purchase signed copies! Join Scott in Plumer Hall on March 12. See more about this event on next page.

Next month, IUCC member Jack Sokol will be offering 4 Zoom sessions on Mindfulness. Jack has been working on certification in Mindfulness Education, so this will be an exciting addition to IUCC’s adult programming. See more about this event on next page.
Mindfulness Class Starting

A year ago, I embarked on a big adventure: getting certified as a teacher in Mindfulness Meditation. Now I am teaching my first class here at IUCC. This class will be offered online on Zoom as an introduction to Mindfulness meditation. While it is geared to people who have little or no experience with meditation, experienced meditators are welcome!

Mindfulness is an ancient secular tradition that is supported by modern science. Mindfulness is a proven technique for improving physical and mental health. Mindfulness reduces stress and anxiety and can also address emotional trauma.

This is a rough patch in Humanity’s timeline. Learning new ways to pay attention to our body and mind can help us let go of stress. Mindfulness can help us develop the wisdom and insight to act effectively and appropriately during times of great change.

Jack Sokol has over fifty years of experience in Meditation and has been privileged to have studied with some truly great teachers in a number of traditions. He has significant experience in meditation and is dedicated to helping others overcome obstacles in their practices.

Ash Wednesday Service

Ash Wednesday Service
Wednesday, March 2, at 7 p.m.

IUCC’s annual Ash Wednesday service will take place on March 2 at 7 p.m. This is a lovely, intimate, and contemplative service you won’t want to miss. The choir will sing!

Please note these other observances as well:

- Drive-thru Ashes at 12 & 5 p.m. on Mar. 2
- A new sermon series - “A Living Faith”
- Weekly discussions with Pastor Sarah & Bil Aulenbach on her sermon topics

Looking Forward to Holy Week...

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Palm Sunday
9:30 and 11 a.m.
April 10

Maundy Thursday
7 p.m. on April 14

Easter Sunday
9:30 and 11 a.m. on April 17
These are troubling and challenging times, my friends. As if COVID and its variants weren’t enough to worry about, now we have the spectre of war hanging over the world as Russia invades Ukraine. As I watch the crisis unfolding, I can’t help but feel disheartened and dismayed. It’s a lot to absorb, and I suspect we’re all feeling pretty frustrated and powerless right now.

I’m grateful to Pastor Sarah for Sunday’s uplifting sermon that encouraged us to find joy amidst our sorrow, and I’m thankful to her for organizing the candlelight vigil in support of the Ukrainian people. It felt good to do something positive with my church family to show solidarity.

In the midst of our angst, we find ourselves on the precipice of a new religious season that may match our somber mood quite well. March 2 marks the beginning of Lent, a roughly 40 day period that starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Maundy Thursday. While it’s often considered a primarily Catholic observance, many other Christians participate as well. During Lent, some people commit to fasting, while others give up a bad habit in a spirit of self-sacrifice or add a spiritual discipline to feel closer to God. It is a time of contemplation and renewal when we are encouraged to ask for forgiveness, do good works, and strive to become better human beings. All of these can give us a sense of purpose and focus right now.

IUCC holds a solemn Ash Wednesday service each year that is very contemplative and meaningful. It’s one of my favorite services. We will hold this special service at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 2. I hope you will attend and enter into the spirit of this religious observance by praying and trying to make a real connection with God as we strive to make some sense of these crazy times and do our best to support one another through it all.

As you may know, Administrative Pastor Steve Swope is retiring at the end of May. Steve is a multi-talented guy who wears many “hats,” and we’ve come to depend upon him a great deal. While he will be impossible to replace, we’ll do our best.

The Administration Board has been discussing how Steve’s position should be reconfigured. We have decided to move forward with a model that will return the position to something closer to what it was in the past: a three-pronged job that would encompass office tasks, facilities management, and preschool support. The new position will be 32 hours per week, and the new job title will be IUCC Administrator. Click here for full job description: https://www.iucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Administrator-Job-Posting-Feb-2022.pdf

Steve does a lot more than office administration, however. He also does a lot of our tech work and supervises adult education programs. Starting in June, Steve’s tech responsibilities will be absorbed by our current Technology Assistant, Gemini Grace, whose hours will be extended from 10 to 20 hours per week. The focus of Gemini’s expanded position will be taking over all worship-related tech, printing work, and weekly electronic communications.

Adult programs will go without a paid staff position for the time being. This new model will save the church some money and allow for expanded volunteer leadership in that ministry. IUCC has been blessed with some wonderful volunteers who have stepped up to share their expertise by leading Bible study, adult Sunday School, special classes, book studies, women’s programs, and more. These talented folks have provided a wide array of original programs that have sustained our members and kept us connected through the difficult times of the pandemic. We plan to stay flexible and see if this configuration can continue to function as it has been doing recently.

I am delighted to be working with the amazing Craig Tyrl to clean/refurbish/redecorate the outside display case so it will be cheerful, welcoming, and informative. We hope to unveil the completed project at some point this month. Look for lots of photographs of happy people doing important work and having fun!

I continue to meet regularly with the Child Care Committee and the Fund Development Committee and have now begun to attend Membership Ministry meetings as well. Under the very capable leadership of new Chair Renae Boyum, this ministry is poised to expand our membership and tackle the challenges ahead.

We have a truly wonderful thing going here, my friends, and it’s too good not to share with others. I hope all of you will join me in welcoming, inviting, and involving new people into the vibrant life of our beloved congregation!
Diversity & Inclusion Lunches Resume

It’s been a while since we’ve had one of our diversity get-togethers, and it’s time to return! These events give us a great opportunity to learn about another culture while enjoying a delicious meal with friends.

We have scheduled an outing to Kareem’s in Anaheim at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 19. The restaurant is at the corner of Brookhurst and Ball. Kareem, and/or a family member, will speak to our group on the patio as we dine. Kareem’s (https://www.kareemsfalafel.com) has very good food and has plenty of plant-based options as well as the things you’d expect at a Middle Eastern restaurant.

Please let us know if you plan to attend so we can have a headcount. We will invite a couple of our Palestinian friends (and their friends) to join us.

Craig & Mary
craigrepp@gmail.com

Post Pandemic Project & Patio Potluck on Palm Sunday!

Sunday, April 10, after second service
All-Church Work Day and Potluck

Mark your calendar and plan to come! This will be a fun day to get together for food and good company while “rolling up our sleeves” to do a little sprucing up of our church property. We’ll have some long-overdue projects to tackle, but they’ll be done in a spirit of celebration with friends old and new. Wear your work clothes, bring a dish to share, and join with others to clean and repair our beloved church!

Craig & Mary
craigrepp@gmail.com

Name Tag Sunday - March 13

As we open our doors more fully to members and visitors, it’s important that we know who’s who!

The Membership Ministry has designated MARCH 13 as NAME TAG SUNDAY! If you have an IUCC name tag (at home, in your car, in some drawer, or perhaps even left at church), please wear it! If you have a name tag from another organization, wear that. If you need a name tag, we’ll have paper ones available for you to fill out. AND we’ll order IUCC name tags for those who are interested so we can all WELCOME, INVITE, and INVOLVE together!

Name Tag Sunday

3/20 Anne Aulenbach
3/07 Mahmoud Baghbani
3/10 Wayne Banwell
3/11 Daniel Blackburn
3/16 Erin Burke
3/27 David Carruthers
3/10 Dylan Dobbert
3/16 Anders Evensen
3/11 Suzie Feick
3/11 Panee Hsiang
3/24 Xin Li
3/10 Lauren Louie
3/26 Barbara Moss
3/16 Jan Osborne
3/24 Tom Ruiz
3/01 Ruth Sandberg
3/26 Melissa Sokol
3/25 Jordan Willcox
3/29 Nicholas Willcox

Happy Birthday
Ministry with Young People (MYP) is pleased to announce Myrna Bohan has joined as Co-Chair alongside Lauren Louie and Ava Mitchell (Co- and Vice Chair, respectively).

You may have encountered Myrna’s warm cheer, witnessed her fine hand in the thoughtful crafts the kids make during her lessons, or seen her in action as a Sunday School teacher, Advent Workshop table leader, or as our Christmas Pageant Director. We are so pleased she brings her skills, experience, and spark to the mix!

If you have questions, ideas, or want to get involved, you now have three of us to contact along with members of our super volunteer team! (llouie735@gmail.com, myrnabohan@gmail.com, ava.mitchell@ocsart.net)

Life of Moses Series and other Kids Sunday School Fun!

Kids Sunday School is currently offering a series called “Life of Moses” which teaches the Biblical stories of Moses and connects those lessons with present day struggles such as the ongoing pursuit of civil rights and social justice. This series is thanks to Martha Mecartney – director, creative, and teacher.

Mark your calendars for Sun, March 27, after second service, when the series will culminate in a dramatic play put on by Martha, the kids, and other MYPers. Until then, here are a few pictures from Life of Moses and other Sunday School lessons!

The pictures below are from the Life of Moses segment “The Red Sea.” The kids learned about the Parting of the Red Sea, Day of Remembrance, played “What time is it Mr. Pharaoh (Fox),” and painted set pieces:

These pictures are from Fat Sunday when we made Mardi Gras/ Carnival masks:

In Middle School or High School? Or know someone who is?

MYP is reaching out now about information sessions, service events, and more to start up two Youth Groups. Keep an eye out on your mail (physical & virtual) or contact Myrna Bohan directly (myrnabohan@gmail.com) to join in!
Meet Jennifer and Mollie! Jennifer is on the left wearing a blue mask, and Mollie is on the right wearing a pink mask.

Jennifer and Mollie interviewed each other as an opportunity for all of IUCC to get to know them.

Jennifer - My name is Jennifer and I am 9 years old.
Mollie - My name is Mollie and I am 7 years old. We decided to ask each other about our favorites things.

What they have in common
We both have little brothers! Jennifer’s brother is Lewis who is 5, and Mollie’s brother is Micah who is 4. They also both love flowers, unicorns, and mermaids.

What is your favorite Animal?
Jennifer – Panda
Mollie- Cheetah and Unicorns

What do you want to be when you are grown up?
Mollie – Famous singer and actress
Jennifer – An actress or an illustrator

What is your favorite Holiday?
Jennifer – Christmas and Halloween. Halloween because you get to dress up.
Mollie – Christmas and Easter! I love all of the Christmas stuff and I like the egg hunt on Easter.

What do you like to do on vacation?
Jennifer – Stay in a beach house that has a pool.
Mollie – Hawaii and any hotel that has a pool with a giant slide.

Their Pets –
Mollie has a dog named Bailey who likes to sit down and lay around.
Jennifer has two fish – one fish is black with yellow flecks and her catfish is an orange-yellow color. One fish likes to hide.

What do they like about church?
Seeing each other and their other church friends. Sometimes they are the only girls in Sunday School but that is ok. They also love the crafts, singing, fun activities, and playing on the playground. Their favorite thing about being in the church with grownups is Fresh Word!
On Memorial Day 2019, tornadoes swept through the Miami Valley of Ohio, destroying thousands of homes and apartments and leaving a trail of downed trees and power lines in their wake. Many of the tornado-affected families have had to relocate multiple times since the tornadoes due to substandard housing conditions and inflated rent.

Two years after the storm, the Stephens family were still unable to find adequate living quarters. The family of ten was forced to live apart. In addition to dealing with unscrupulous contractors, the family had to haggle with insurance companies as they tried to rebuild their home. The Stephenses, like so many other families, remained in temporary housing and separated, pending the completion of repairs.

Yet, all was not lost. The Stephens family connected with the Miami Valley Long-Term Recovery Operations Group, and volunteer teams finished the repairs.

Alongside these traditional home repair projects, and with support from One Great Hour of Sharing, the MVLTROG helped launch the Tornado Survivors’ Pathways to Homeownership Project to help alleviate the housing crunch in the Dayton area. Volunteers and local nonprofits work together to transition “nuisance” properties and vacant lots into affordable, single-family housing options for tornado survivors who were displaced from rental housing, stabilizing both families and the community. First-time homeowners receive the support they need to build for their futures.

Sammy Deacon, Brethren Disaster Ministries Long-Term Project Leader, says “When you reach out to help someone else, the blessing comes back to you as well. An important aspect of the recover effort is listening to people’s stories and knowing you have the opportunity to help them - physically and spiritually.” With support for long-term recovery, including innovative programs like the Pathways to Homeownership project, One Great Hour of Sharing helps create opportunities for families to thrive after disasters. Because Love remains.
WE CAN DO IT!
THE TRADITIONAL ANNUAL IUCC WOMEN’S RETREAT AT PILGRIM PINES IS BACK.

We have reserved 20 spaces in our customary lodgings for April 29-May 1, 2022

We are very pleased that Rev. Jill Kirchner-Rose, a very popular facilitator from a previous retreat, has agreed to lead us again.

Since space is limited we will need to get a preliminary count as soon as possible!

To reserve a space for the retreat, please send an email or phone message to:
Lorraine Fox at pgfsc@cox.net (949) 916-0176
Or Pastor Steve at the IUCC Church Office Steve@IUCC.org (949) 733-0220

Please write or call by March 11.

It’s (about) time to return to the mountains to renew, refresh, relax, and re-connect with your IUCC Sisters!

In Memorium

We are very saddened by the recent loss of two members of the IUCC family.

Michael Curry, Judy Curry’s husband, died peacefully on February 10 in Costa Mesa after losing his battle with Younger Onset Alzheimer’s at the age of 64. A private Celebration of Life will be held this spring. In lieu of flowers, the Curry family asks that donations be sent to the Alzheimer’s Association or the Equal Justice Initiative.

Condolences may be sent to Judy Curry at 20931 Avenida Amapola
Lake Forest CA 92630

Lynn Carpenter died in the company of a dear friend, early on February 20. A memorial service will be held at IUCC on Friday, March 4 at 11:00 am.

Condolences may be sent to Tom & Lu Baker
413 Holmwood Drive
Newport Beach CA 92663

Lynn was an active member of our Diversity & Inclusion Ministry, and she will be greatly missed.

To read a wonderful 1994 LA Times article about Lynn’s reforestation work in Costa Rica, click here:
We seem – blessedly – to be moving out of “pandemic mode” and slowly back into routines and relationships we experienced two years ago. Two years is a long time in the life of children. We hear adults complaining constantly about the “loss” of the past couple of years, but it would be respectful of children and teens to be clear about the difference that chunk of time is for an adult and how much of a young person’s total life it has been! With that in mind, we want to patient as we wait for signs of recovery from the complete disruption of our lives and theirs. We want to keep in perspective the vast difference in proportion between how much life was lived before the disruption, how much adults brought prior learning and experience into the crisis, and how much less “normalcy” and experience children carried into the same situation. The impact on their development and emotional well-being will be profound.

Since the pandemic started, we’ve been considering many facets of “resilience” and how differences in vulnerabilities and life experiences impact how much difficulty young people will have moving forward with a sense of strength and capability. Our last few months have been spent looking at how well or how poorly a child/teen’s “basic needs” have been met prior to enduring the traumatic turn of events for many children and adults alike. We’ve examined the early lessons in being able to count on others for a sense of survival – both physically and emotionally; early experiences with security and predictability; how well integrated into welcoming groups of other people – family and friends – kids experienced before having to spend so much time separated from others; and whether they have been gifted with the experience of love from others.

The fifth “basic need” according to Maslow is Self-Esteem. Remembering that Maslow arranged these six basic needs in a “hierarchy” – or pyramid – we can see that feelings of self-worth (or self-“esteem”) are a result of the other needs having been met. One cannot believe in one’s personal value if one has not been fed, kept warm, and comforted when lonely or frightened. One cannot feel “good” about oneself if they are always anxious about their environment and don’t know what they can count on. One cannot feel worthy, valued, capable, and proud if they have not been accepted and valued by others. One can certainly not believe that they are “good,” are important to others, and be confident if they have not been loved.

Some time ago, schools and other child-centered programs were trying to introduce “self-esteem” training for children as if it could be taught separate from other life experiences. We learned, not surprisingly, that feelings of low self-esteem, feelings of isolation and defenselessness, feelings of powerlessness, passivity or aggressive behavior cannot be undone without the necessary experiential foundation of safety, security, belonging, and love.

Because the past couple of years of exposure to adult weaknesses in handling the stress of the health crisis – anger, substance abuse, isolation, and frustration over being a parent, teacher, and friend to their children – we might have to put some effort into the foundation elements of self-esteem to build up the self-confidence children and teens will need as they return to school, and play, and multiple interactions.

Self-esteem is not installed by “talk,” but by building a strong sense of worth through gentle, loving, patient parenting. And you don’t have to be a parent to parent. Let’s all get in there – parents, grandparents, neighbors, and teachers. They will know they are valuable when you value them, not when you tell them they are. Feeling valued builds confidence; confidence builds strength; strength will hold them up as they go into the “next.”
Humble Pie
by Vivian Elaine Johnson

There are many reasons for a human to be humble. Appearance is one of them. Ever since my friend Sharon pointed out that I had a hair on my chin, I’ve been quite diligent in seeking out those pesky invaders and snipping them off. A close look in the mirror and there it is – a curly, white hair hanging from my chin like a talisman on an aged face. Since when did I start growing a beard? Now I understood my husband’s puzzlement when he had toileting accidents in his old age. He’d shake his cute head and mutter, “How did that happen? I didn’t give it permission.”

Recently, an elderly gentleman approached me and gave me a sweet compliment. Like most people, I love a compliment but this one caused me to race to the bathroom mirror for a look. I saw my dad’s silver, wavy hair. However, my silver hair is thinning. Grandma Mattson’s delphinium-blue eyes stared out at me, but my sight is not what it once was. And, yes, in the mirror I was reminded that Mother’s slightly puffy body is mine. Then, looking closer I saw it once again: a white hair hung from my chin even though I had not given it permission. In spite of the man’s sweet compliment, his words didn’t ring true with what I saw with my own eyes. Perhaps his dimmed vision aided him in his assessment of me.

Another reason for humility is lack of skill. During the Covid pandemic, while our facility beauty shop was closed, I cut my own hair. Well, to be honest, I chopped my hair. When a local beauty shop reopened, I decided to get a professional cut. The beautician greeted me, happy to have customers once again. She was a tiny Asian-American woman, a recent immigrant, slim as a toothpick with shiny, perfectly coifed, ebony black hair. She combed through my hair in preparation for the cut, wrinkled her nose, and said, “You hair es messy, berry messy.” In my embarrassment I admitted, “Yes, I cut my own hair several times during the pandemic.” She shook her head in obvious disapproval and repeated with solemnity, “Berry messy. You no do it. I fix.” (I decided not to tell her that I butchered my husband’s hair as well.) As I left with my properly cut hair, she admonished with a shake of her finger, “You no cut your hair again.” So much for my barbering skills.

I was pleased as his question gave me an opportunity to talk about my new interest, genetically modified organisms. It is the study of how plants, animals, or other organisms are modified in a laboratory using genetic engineering, a controversial process as some people believe it is not healthy for us to consume such products. With excitement in my voice and my eyes glowing with new knowledge, I eagerly began, “I’m devoting some time to a new area of study.” My cheeks were flushed as I anticipated educating my distinguished guest. “It is an extremely fascinating subject. I’m learning about genetically modified orgasms!”

You’ve got to admit that the words organism and orgasm are hard to distinguish twins. Later, when recounting my gargantuan mistake, my husband laughed and said, “The guy probably thought, ‘I’ll take two of those genetically modified things.’”

When Mr. Business returned to his office in Minnesota, he probably told his colleagues about the wacky pastor’s wife in California. Some Midwesterners think that California contains a lot of loonies. Now they had new evidence.

That was just one more evening when I ate humble pie for dinner.
The newly revitalized Membership Ministry under the leadership of Chair Renae Boyum is gearing up for great things! One of the key things we’re hoping you keep in mind is that ALL of us are members of this ministry, and ALL of us need to keep our eyes out for new folks and make sure they are greeted and welcomed into our wonderful congregation. If you’re a bit on the shy side like me, you may ask yourself “But what do I say? How do I break the ice and engage them in conversation?” I did an internet search for ice-breaker questions and found hundreds of them! Here is Part 2 of my favorite questions.

1. What would your dream house look like?
2. If you could have anyone fictional as your imaginary friend, who do you choose and why?
3. What’s your favorite holiday tradition? Why?
4. What book/movie have you read/seen recently that you would recommend? Why?
5. If you had a time machine, would you go back in time or forward into the future?
6. Have you ever met your idol or someone you greatly admire? How did it feel?
7. Have you completed everything on your “bucket list”? What’s next on your “bucket list”?
8. Are you a cat person or a dog person?
9. What languages do you speak? Which one(s) would you like to learn?
10. What’s the most out-of-character thing you’ve ever done?
11. If you could choose any two famous people to have dinner with, who would they be and why?
12. If you could be any animal in the world, what animal would you choose to be?
13. If you could do anything in the world as your career, what would you do?
14. If you could change places with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?
15. If you had to teach a class on one thing, what would it be?
16. If you could be immortal, at what age would you choose to stop aging, and why?
17. Would you rather be the funniest or the smartest person in the room?
18. If you could donate a million dollars to any charity, what cause would you choose?
19. What school subject was your favorite? Least favorite?
20. What is the most amazing story about your family? Do they have a story about you that they always re-tell when you’re together?
21. Describe the best teacher you ever had.
22. What was your most unique pet? If you could have any animal for a pet, what would it be?
23. If you could choose any name besides your name, what would you choose?
24. If you could switch lives with anyone for a day, who would it be?
25. What is the best advice or guidance you have ever been given? What single piece of advice would you give your younger self?

Isn’t this fun?! Mix and match ‘em for a stimulating conversation. Before you know it, you’ll have charmed the socks off the visitor (and maybe even made a new friend!).
Can Faith/Religion and Reason/Science Coexist?

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, Adult Education Ministry and Diversity & Inclusion Ministry

Faith / Religion and Reason / Science can coexist in varying degrees of conflict and compatibility. Albert Einstein believed that science without religion was lame and religion without science was blind. The debate of whether Faith / Religion and Reason / Science can coexist has been going on since the dawn of humankind and continues to divide opinions. Reason / Science is based on facts whereas Faith / Religion refers to beliefs as a function of inspiration and revelation. Faith / Religion is about beliefs that lack reason or empirical evidence. Reason / Science holds that truth can be ascertained by factual analysis rather than by dogma, faith, or religious teaching. Fideism holds that faith is necessary and that beliefs may be held without empirical evidence and even be in conflict with empirical evidence and reason. Rationalism, on the other hand, is built upon the realization of the absolute truth of “I think therefore I am” (cf. René Descartes) which requires no faith whatsoever and is subject to falsification by contradictory evidence with the arrival of new evidence.

One can argue that it is possible for Faith / Religion and Reason / Science to coexist. Oxford University mathematician John Lennox, Cambridge University mathematical physicist John Polkinghorne, and Cape Town University physicist John Ellis are but a few examples of scholars and intellectuals who are religious. Yet there are others, such as Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss and the late Stephen Hawkins, who are anti-religious. With this preface I do believe that science, for example evolution, and religious beliefs or faith need not be in contradiction. If Faith / Religion and Reason / Science is properly understood, then the two cannot be in contradiction because each is concerned with different matters. Faith / Religion and Reason / Science are like two different windows for looking at and understanding the world. In my opinion, Science / Reason looks at matter and the atmosphere as well as the origin and adaptations of organisms, whereas Faith / Religion is concerned with the meaning and purpose of the world and of human life as well as the proper relationship between people and the Creator and to each other. Faith / Religion is about moral values that inspire and govern people’s lives which are different from Reason / Science. Since the first scientists were clergypersons, then it is entirely plausible to conclude that Faith / Religion and Reason / Science can coexist.

Whether you have any faith or adhere to religious tenets, it is important to reflect upon the fact that there are religious scientists. For instance, a religious geologist probably would not think that the Earth and everything else was actually made by God 6,000 years ago, since their science tells them that the Earth is 4.5 billion years old. So then what is faith? All faiths are just admonitions that there is something beyond our understanding. Perhaps religion is flawed, but only because humankind is flawed. I believe that the notion that Faith / Religion and Reason / Science are mutually exclusive is a disservice to both. From Faith / Religion comes humankind’s purpose whereas from Reason / Science comes the power to achieve such purpose.

Finally, Faith / Religion and Reason / Science both offer explanations for why life and the universe exist. Reason / Science relies on testable and observable empirical evidence. Faith / Religion relies on subjective belief in a Supreme Being—a Creator. Faith / Religion and Reason / Science provides ways to search truth, and denying either is a barren approach. Can Faith / Religion and Reason / Science coexist? Perhaps they can... My mathematical training tells me that a number such as “1” when divided by a very large number eventually becomes “0” and yet it is impossible for me to find that large number. I can only represent that large number by the lemniscate or horizontal eight symbol “∞”. My faith tells me that the larger the number is, as I divide it by “1”, it approaches a limit of “0” or “1/∞ = 0.0000……” The answer to the question “Can Faith / Religion and Reason / Science Coexist?” depends on many factors and only you can arrive at a conclusion and provide an answer that is satisfactory to you.
The Affirmation of Life from Fredrich Nietzsche

by The Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge
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The importance of an affirmation of life

One of the problems that I have with the 8 points of Progressive Christianity is that there is no joy, no celebration of life, no appreciation of the wonder and greatness of God’s creation. This element is lacking. Nietzsche, in his complete affirmation of life, does not support Progressive Christianity in terms of what is in the eight points, but rather in providing support for what is missing.

Worship is celebration, calling upon God and remembering the life, actions and teachings of Jesus. There is joy that comes from the good news of God’s love, grace, healing and reconciliation.

A person cannot listen to Beethoven’s Ode to Joy without feeling joy, because the music is so powerful. Watching a Jewish wedding, with the bride lifted up, sitting in a chair, and being taken around the room in a vigorous dance to the music of Hava Nagila, is a great celebration of life. The Jewish toast, L’chaim, means “to life.” It is celebratory.

Nietzsche’s affirmation of life

Nietzsche embraces an affirmation of life that is unparalleled in philosophy, theology, poetry, prose, or any other expressive medium, with the exception of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy. His concept of eternal return or eternal recurrence embraces a bold and exuberant affirmation of life. This saying yes to life embraces all of life, including pain and sorrow.

Nietzsche saw Christianity at his time as destructive of joy in living. At the center of his philosophy is the concept of eternal return or eternal recurrence—that a person’s life cycle returns on a continual basis, so that they keep living the exact life over and over again. Eternal recurrence is the idea that everything in existence has been recurring for an infinite number of times across time and space and will continue to do so. This concept embraces the responsibility that comes from accepting the consequences, good or bad, of one’s willful action.

In opposition to Schopenhauer’s advocacy of self-denial and negation of life, Nietzsche is the ultimate “yes” sayer in life. His affirmation is, in its basic sense, the most fundamental gesture that says Yes to life. It is the unconditional loving act that embraces life fully as it is, without any modifications or correction. There’s a total acceptance, with no desire for any changes.

Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence appears in several of his writings. This concept is central in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Nietzsche was drawn to the arts, especially music, and Greek tragedy, which he saw as a brave and bold way of dealing with the hard things in life, turning them into a positive. He speaks of both Zarathustra’s happiness and the musicality of his voice: “From an infinite fullness of light and depth of happiness drop falls after drop, word for word” as well as the necessity of “hearing properly the tone that issues from his mouth, this halcyon tone.”

Nietzsche further states: “If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event—and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.”

Further, he states in Ecce Homo: “My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it— all idealism is mendacity in the face of what is necessary—but love it.”

He wants to make things beautiful: “I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.”

Walter Kaufmann has said: “Nietzsche celebrates the Greeks who, facing up to the terrors of nature and history, “Nietzsche” article continued on page 17
did not seek refuge in ‘a Buddhistic negation of the will,’ as Schopenhauer did, but instead created tragedies in which life is affirmed as beautiful in spite of everything.”

The eternal return is for the strong and not for the weak, who are unable to handle their guilt over sin and dread over life’s hardships. Eternal recurrence is the highest form of happiness for the strong, because it’s the ultimate affirmation of life. Eternal recurrence is a dreadful prospect to those who bear guilt for sin and who fear suffering, but it isn’t a burden for the strong, because they carry no such guilt or fear. The eternal recurrence is a playground for the strong, as well as a liberation, as they embrace life fully.

**Conclusion**

I have said that existentialism tends toward the extreme. This is also true of Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence. However, the joy that he finds in life, totally accepting life as it is, creates a lesson for us all. Nietzsche’s joy in living, joie de vivre, provides a bold and beautiful additive to the 8 Points of Progressive Christianity.

It is not necessary to accept the concept of eternal recurrence for Progressive Christians to benefit from Nietzsche’s main idea of affirming every aspect of life. The take-away from Nietzsche is the importance of the act of affirmation. To come alive, the 8 Points of Progressive Christianity must embrace the act of affirmation. This begins with the act of affirmation of the eight principles. This gives importance and priority. Next, is the affirmation of shared group and individual faith beliefs. An important congregational affirmation would be the importance of the study of the historical Jesus. Another important affirmation, with Easter approaching, would be affirming the power of the resurrection metaphor for our church congregation and for us as individuals. In prayers during the church worship service, I have stated that we are a resurrection church.

In Nietzsche’s time, the “church” was in bad shape, both Catholic and Protestant. Also, there were many rival factions. If Nietzsche were alive today, it would be interesting to get his take on progressive Christian churches. One of his key concerns was the creation of a new society.

**Footnote:** It is probable that the Greek god, Dionysus, was a hero for Nietzsche. Dionysus was the Olympian god of wine, vegetation, pleasure, festivity, madness and wild frenzy. Dionysus epitomized joy and celebration. Nietzsche mentioned Dionysus in many of his writings, showing strong feelings for this Greek god.

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