



## IUCC's Christmas Pageant on December 20th was joyful and memorable!

Even though we couldn't meet in person, we didn't let the pandemic stop us from having a great online Christmas pageant! An enormous amount of time, heart, and joy went into producing one of the most memorable pageants in our history. Kudos to our wonderful staff and volunteers for all your hard work and creativity - your efforts are very much appreciated!



*Photos are screen captures from the online pageant*



## IUCC 2020 ADVENT CALENDAR



## From Our Settled Pastor

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



Never have we so much anticipated the end of a year! 2020 brought with it so much pain, suffering, divisiveness and isolation. It changed the way we live in previously unimagined ways. It changed the way we do church. It financially gutted the nation, and the church was not unscathed. We said goodbye to too many loved ones, neighbors and community members. For so many reasons, we eagerly shut the door on 2020.

As a pastor, many have confided in me that in addition to the loss of life, their biggest challenges have been the loss of their faith in humanity. There's a feeling of disconnection, a dismal outlook that fears that 2021 will treat us no better, because we will not treat each other any better. I would be lying if I did not share that I hold some of the same emotions. Like so many of you, it feels so easy to fall into despair knowing that this year begins at the height of the pandemic with no end in sight.

And yet, as I reflected on my own New Year's celebrations as a parent, I realize the importance of living beyond despair. As a mother, my task is to be intentional about creating safe space with joy-filled wonder. What I realize is that my creation and intentionality is just as much for myself as it is for my children. Just as they need sanctuaries where their little souls can laugh, play and feel comforted with a barrier of love that buoys them when the outside world is terrifying, so do we.

It turns out, my roles as pastor and parent aren't always so different. We must live in both worlds, we must hold this tension - we must see the pain and name the injustice, but we must also be the sanctuary of joy, wonder, and even laughter. We must create safe spaces filled with love.

Fortunately, I think that's what we do. As I reflect on 2020, I am struck with the sadness of the year, and I have not fully grasped its implications. I have not fully mourned. And yet I'm also so aware of the gifts that came: the very obvious one that reunited us as we stepped into a new relationship together as pastor and church, but also the sometimes less tangible gifts that came in creativity, or the previously unimaginable way relationships could be built through screens, and our recognition that simple pleasures really can bring joy and appreciation. Oh, how I've come to appreciate the small things! But I've also gained a deeper recognition of gratitude for the big things as I value the gift of life and recognize its sacredness on a daily level. I've learned to discern what things are worth my time, energy, and focus. In some ways, 2020 truly helped us define what matters.

The challenge will be for us to see with 2020 vision, not to give into the urge to shut the door and never open it again - but to see it for all that it was, to learn from it, and to walk into this new year aware of the pain, willing to hold it, face it and fight it, but also with a willingness to experience joy, to laugh, and wonder and embrace (sometimes even as we are creating) a sanctuary of love.

I'm optimistic about how 2021 will unfold for us, IUCC. I'm eager to walk into this new year with you. I'm excited to see how we'll mine creativity and generosity, how we'll laugh together and grow in our relationships, and how we will use our voices, our minds, our channeled anger to effect change in our communities, because we recognize our task to seek justice not merely joy. May we be wise enough to hold it all without being overwhelmed by pain, or out of touch - unscathed, thanks to our privilege. If we can learn the lessons of 2020, they will serve us our whole lives long, not just this new year unfolding before us.

I pray that this year will see us together not only in heart, not only present in faith and intention, but also in shared space where we can sing out with passion and part with warm hugs! Until then, I can't wait to do real ministry in virtual ways with all of you!

Happy New Year IUCC!

Your Pastor,  
*Sarah*



## Winter Congregational Meeting via Zoom

**Sunday, Jan. 31, at 12:30 p.m.**

IUCC will be conducting our annual Winter Meeting to approve the 2021 Budget, hear the State of the Church from Pastor Sarah, and consider four Bylaw Amendments (see below).

In order for us to conduct this meeting, we need a quorum of 25% of corporate members.

Per our Bylaws, there will be a Budget Forum a week before the Congregational Meeting to answer any additional questions:

**Budget Forum via Zoom**  
**Sunday, Jan. 24, at 12:30 p.m.**

Zoom log-in information for each meeting will be provided in e-blasts sent in the week preceding each meeting.

### Bylaw Amendments to be considered:

- Creation of Ministry of Diversity & Inclusion.
- Revised Vision Statement (to add the bolded text): Irvine United Congregational Church seeks growth in spirit, fellowship and number **by becoming a more culturally diverse congregation**; by strengthening our capacity to serve our neighbors and community; by caring for each other as God cares for us; by inviting others to be part of our community of faith; and by working to transform individual lives and our community through the power to God's love in human action.
- Voting privileges for the Ministries Board Youth Representative from non-voting to voting on non-financial matters.
- Indemnification language (provided by outside counsel).

## From the Administrative Pastor

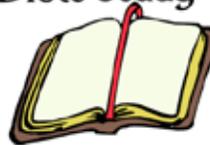
by the Rev. Steve Swope

Happy New Year, everyone! We survived 2020 (where's my t-shirt?). And IUCC's Adult Programs Ministry is ready to help you get 2021 started on the right foot.



Of course, we'll be operating on Zoom for a while, but we're all used to that by now. Watch the Tuesday and Friday email updates for Zoom links for specific events and studies.

### Bible Study



Ken Wyant continues to offer insight and good humor on Tuesday afternoons at 4:00, as we study the biblical stories about King David (reading through 2 Samuel right now).

I will be resuming the Old Testament Survey on Wednesday, Jan. 6 at 7:00 pm, picking up the book of Joshua after a brief review of the first five books.



Diversity & Inclusion has two Saturday Forums planned, for Jan. 9 & 23 at 10:30 am. Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi will discuss the ways different cultures present mathematics on Jan. 9, and on Jan.

23 Ben Christy will talk about how his marriage to a Black woman and their four children have helped him unpack his white privilege.

And Eduardo will be joined by Sarah Wall in facilitating another Talking About Work session on Saturday, Jan. 16, at 10:30 am.

Looking ahead, there's another Diversity & Inclusion Forum on Feb. 13. And on Sunday, March 7, at 1:00 pm, we will co-host (with University Synagogue) our next guest speaker! Rabbi Rachel Mikva of Chicago Theological Seminary will speak on ideas from her new book *Dangerous Religious Ideas: The Deep Roots of Self-Critical Faith in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Put this in your calendar now!

# From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes



I am so impressed with you, my fellow members of this dear and beloved congregation. You read, you process, and you make good and thoughtful decisions. I haven't been your Moderator very long, but I'm really grateful for your willingness to show up, pay attention, and vote on matters of great importance to our

church. Bless you for that! You've read the materials, you've educated yourselves, and you've voted like the smart and loving people you are.

An excellent example of this was the recent Special Congregational Meeting. We called the meeting to approve a loan of up to \$400,000 (later amended to \$427,000) to get us through the pandemic. A lot was riding on it. Our preschool has been sustaining financial losses, and we needed the loan to give it time to recover. If we didn't approve the loan, we were looking at staff and program cuts that would have been very painful indeed.

I was concerned that we might not get a quorum, let alone the 2/3 vote needed to approve a loan. That's a pretty high bar! I wasn't sure that members would attend because the meeting was about money, and not everyone is comfortable talking about money.

I needn't have worried. Over 95 of you were in attendance, and the vote was 91 to 4 in favor of the amended motion. Thank you, my friends! I am so relieved and grateful that we now have a cushion to help bridge the gap.

You've been rock stars when it comes to pledging too. Renae Boyum and the Fund Development Committee asked, and you delivered. At last count, we had pledges from 122 households totaling almost \$419,000. That's tremendous! Thank you for your loving support during this difficult time. It means a lot!

We've been charting new territory together ever since the pandemic started, and it's not over yet. Through it all, our faith has guided and sustained us. We've been each other's sanctuary, providing emotional support when needed. Our Congregational Care Ministry has provided cards, calls, food and prayer for those who are sick. Our Mission & Service Ministry has continued to help the

needy and the homeless. Our Comma groups, book clubs, and Bible studies have given us opportunities to learn, connect, and share warm fellowship. So many of you have pitched in to help. We are looking out for each other!

I can't heap enough kudos on our wonderful staff and volunteers for producing such loving and heart-warming worship services online each Sunday. For me, the absolute over-the-moon service of them all was the Christmas Pageant on December 20. It was funny, poignant, and light-hearted - a total joy from beginning to end. If you missed it (or even if you want to see it again), it's still available on our church's Facebook page.

All of these things are balm for the soul in these troubling times. I thank God for you and this church. We may have our problems, but we have a great track record of coming together, brainstorming ideas, and developing solutions.

On January 31, we'll hold our Winter Congregational Meeting. It will be on Zoom as everything else has been these days. We'll be reviewing the 2021 budget, looking at some bylaw amendments, hearing Pastor Sarah speak about the State of the Church, and welcoming the new Ministry of Diversity and Inclusion (a very happy event!). Please plan to attend the congregational meeting and - if you have questions about the budget - plan to attend the budget forum on January 24.

After that, we won't have another congregational meeting until our Spring Meeting in June, when we'll receive reports from the various ministries and vote on new officers. I'm hoping that by then, we can finally meet in person again. We'll have to wait and see. As much as we all miss each other and long for big welcoming hugs, we have to wait until it's safe. I'm looking forward to that day, and I know you are too.

I hope to "see" you at the upcoming budget forum and the congregational meeting. We'll do our best to answer any questions you may have.

Until then, let's keep the faith and trust that our congregation will weather this storm. I'm praying that all of you feel surrounded by God's love and comfort in these tumultuous times.

In hope and optimism,

*Tricia*

# Report from the IUCC Early Childhood Center

by Keith Boyum, Chair of the Child Care Committee

**Background.** As the special congregational meeting was planned for December 13, our lay leaders worked hard to make a few points very clear about the Child Care Center (aka the preschool). A summary may look like this.

- In about the last five years, the preschool has been increasingly a producer of income for the church. As of early 2020, we served about 63 kids, had just finished generating record net income in 2019, and the congregation at the regular January winter meeting had approved a budget for 2020 that forecast a still-larger net income. As we know, the pandemic changed just about everything.
- Following a mid-March closure of the preschool (as parents kept kids home), we reopened on July 5<sup>th</sup> with new constraints on enrollments. Reacting to the Covid pandemic, our licensing agency now requires strict minimums for square feet per child, requires keeping students separated and in small groups, and requires richer student-teacher ratios. Taken together, the new rules mean that we are now able to serve many fewer than our previous 63 or so kids. We can handle about 38, or with great care and with the hiring of an additional teacher, perhaps 44.
- As a result, the preschool has lost money for the past six months, although things have been improving a little each month since July.

**The Outlook for the New Year.** Enrollments typically pick up a little in January, and we see some signs of that happening for early 2021. That's a good thing. As well, our Child Care Center Director, Irma Rosales, reports that prospective parent-clients have been inquiring about Fall 2021 (as they do each year), and that is a very good thing. We are advertising, and some new families are interested. It now seems appropriate to be cautiously optimistic about the first half of 2021. The preschool will not be able to return net income to the congregation at the pre-pandemic levels with pandemic rules still in place; but as we think about the 2021 budget, we can forecast some positive returns, and we should be able to avoid operating losses.

We can also look forward to a time when the licensing agency will be able to relax its stringent pandemic rules,

allowing us to return to enrollments north of 44 – maybe even a return to 63. That may happen in a context of widespread Covid vaccinations, at a time when, well, you may forecast for yourself, kind reader. Some time in autumn, 2021? Let us all hope!



**The Continuing Story of Caring.** In the meantime, our dedicated staff continues to offer warm welcomes and dedicated care, and serves a loyal clientele who need child care. We are proud of what they do for our community. And here is a specific example of that. On December 9th, each class recorded (via Zoom) a special holiday dance or song – something that, we hear, other preschools decided to forego this year. And to top it off, the kids had a surprise visit from Santa, via Zoom! We knew that parents wouldn't have many opportunities to get to see Santa in the malls this year, so we brought Santa to them! Zooming from his workshop in the North Pole, Santa spoke to each of the children, asked them what they wanted, and promptly promised to add it to his list! It was a joyful day for everyone and fully embodies IUCC's intention to bring that extra special touch to childcare.



## Chancel Choir News



by Dr. Christopher Peterson

Happy New Year! And what a year it's been. None of us could have predicted how many things would change this year for everyone, everything, and our "comfortable" lives as we had known them. Generally, I think we did pretty well while weathering the changes, and I do believe that 2021 will be a much better year for all of us with sustained health, more singing in person, and new growth and satisfaction for all of us. I can't say "thanks" enough for everyone's willingness to hang in there and generate hope for better times. I am grateful for this church, our new Pastor Sarah, our members and families, and the power of music to bring us together, albeit virtually.

We welcome two new Interns to our ranks this month: Jaime Reza (tenor) and Brandi Birdsong (soprano). Their headshots and bios are included here. We are saying goodbye to Brianna as she departs our ranks. Jacob Hall remains with us in 2021.



Brandi Birdsong has been described as a vocalist with "rich tones" and "endless passion." She started her classical journey studying under voice teacher Janet Smith at Cal State University, Fullerton during her undergrad. Though she is classically trained, she has shown her versatility singing in the Broadway, Jazz, and R&B style for various performance opportunities. Brandi has had a handful of accomplishments during her time in her undergrad. Some notable achievements include being a featured vocalist in the Braindead x Converse short film titled "Variations" directed by Dev Hynes, placing 2nd in the 2020 NATS/SEP in the African American Spiritual division, and 2nd at the NATS competition in 2019. She has also been a featured soloist for various concerts in Orange County and Los Angeles.



Jaime Javier Reza is a twenty-three year old Hispanic American Tenor who grew up in East Los Angeles and moved to Whittier in the summer going into high school. There, Jaime learned he had a special gift for singing and realized his passion for it when he won Second Place in the SCVA Solo competition. He then transferred to Fullerton College where he spent three years studying under the vocal teachings of Professor Aram Barsamian as well as the Choral Direction of John Tebay. During his time at Fullerton College, he participated in numerous opera productions where he played the roles of Nicias from "Thais," Don Ottavio from "Don Giovanni," Maritzio from "Adrianna Lecouvreur," and his most memorable, Nemorino from "L'elisir D'amore" as well as many more. Jaime also participated in Solo Competitions where he won 1st place in the Whittier Century Singers Solo competition, SAI Solo Competition, and NATS-LA Sophomore Division Solo Competition. He then transferred to Mt. San Antonio College where he studied for three years. During that time he was a vocal student of Dr. Rebecca Tomlinson for a year and a half, as well as one year with Professor Nathan Wideltz with the Choral Direction of Professor Bruce Rogers. Jaime also participated in the Opera Scenes at Mt. SAC where he played the roles of Alfredo from "La Traviata," Nadir from "Les Pêcheurs De Perles," Tony from "West Side Story," Radames from "Aida" and his favorite Rodolfo from "La Boheme" and many more. Jaime got to travel to South Africa and compete in the Choir Olympics as well as travel to Vienna, Slovakia, and Slovenia competing for Choir of the World. He also competed in the Classical Singer Solo Competition held in Chicago where he received two scholarship award offers. Jaime is looking forward to continuing his studies at CSUF, where he received half a year's tuition scholarship, and plans to one day be performing in major opera houses around the world.



## Mission & Service Collection for the Unsheltered Homeless: January 4 - 28

The 2019 Point in Time Census of homeless people counted over 4,000 unsheltered homeless people in Orange County. That census has been shown to be undercounted and, with Covid, the number this year has increased dramatically.

IUCC Mission & Service Ministry will be working to help Santa Ana's largest unsheltered homeless population, with your help, by donating Jackets & Sweaters or Hygiene & First Aid Kits. Select either one.

- 1) **Jackets & Sweaters & Sweat Shirts** - We all have these items in our closets that we haven't used in many months. We are looking to collect jackets and sweaters for all genders in any sizes. With the colder weather, these items literally can save a life.
- 2) **First Aid & Hygiene Kits** - An M&S member has donated 50 small backpacks to hold these listed items. It will be a great help if you place the listed items in a bag. **Please donate the entire 12 items** listed if possible:

- |                                     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| -Face Masks (paper not cloth)       | -Hand Sanitizer             |
| -Package of Wet Wipes or Wash Cloth | -Tooth Paste & Tooth Brush  |
| -Comb/Brush                         | -Deodorant                  |
| -Small Ibuprofen/Tylenol            | -Anti-Bacterial Ointment    |
| -Band Aids                          | -Warm, thick socks (1 pair) |
| <b>(Try Dollar Tree for these)</b>  | -Bottle of Water            |

IUCC will have only one bin available outside the Narthex from 9:30 to 4:30 from Monday through Thursday. **Again, put all 12 items in one bag and drop in bin. Make sure your Jacket/Sweater donations are in a plastic bag & placed next to the bin.**

Questions? Call Steve Goetz (949) 436-1946 or write to [sgoetz53@gmail.com](mailto:sgoetz53@gmail.com)

Many thanks from the Mission & Service Ministry !!!



## Reflecting on the Legacy of 2020

by Jenna Wadsworth McCarty

### Family Promise Update

The Family Promise Emergency Shelter program continues to be on hold until a majority of participating congregations open up their facilities. Staff believes that the program will not reopen until at least Spring 2021. Through their transitional houses and innovative solutions, Family Promise was able to help 65 families (a total of 257 people) in 2020.

Family Promise's recent newsletter highlighted two new families that were helped recently.

One family of Mom, Dad and a 4-year-old son were living in their car even though both parents worked full time. The mom had a complicated pregnancy while homeless and gave premature birth to a little girl with many medical problems. The beautiful baby girl died after only 52 days of life. The family was welcomed into Family Promise during the brief period when their baby was still alive.

The staff was able to support the family as their baby went through numerous operations and then passed away. Though nothing could ease their loss, Family Promise ensured that their basic needs for food and shelter were met. They were connected to counseling services so they could begin the long process of grieving and healing.

Another new family – a single father and teenage daughter – also had been homeless and living in their car for over a year. The father was working a full-time, low wage job. His 17-year-old daughter was temporarily staying with various friends so she could handle remote learning during Covid. Family Promise was able to reunite father and daughter. Now together, both are thriving. They were able to have Christmas together in their own home.

Thanks to Jean Dietrich and the Breakfast Club, in December Family Promise received a large number of toys for children along with other donations such as diapers and bedding. Family Promise is grateful for those gifts and for all the financial donations and support that IUCC members have contributed.

2021. The much awaited New Year is finally here!

As 2020 came to a close, I heard so many people wanting to throw it into a trash heap, light it on fire, and be done with the year. My goodness. It was a difficult year—we have been through so much just to survive it, so I for one don't want to miss the hard earned lessons!

Before leaping forward into envisioning this coming year, let's take a minute to reflect on the legacy from 2020. What will it be? What inheritance will you choose to carry forward from 2020?

For me, the first word that comes to mind is Discernment. In 2020, Discernment was required on a new level to choose for myself, no matter which way everyone else seems to be going. Discernment for what is essential and what is not. When to go out and when to hold back. What is worth a risk and when is time to be safe, cautious. Discernment for who and what to believe and what is beneath the surface, in between the lines. Discernment to find my own unique path forward. Discernment.

Grace is another. Grace to forgive in a time when we are all making new decisions for a life not yet lived. Grace to leave in the hands of others their choice of what is right and what is wrong. Grace to give the benefit of the doubt, to look for the good in the other, despite the deep differences between us.

Hope. Hope that we will make it through all of this time, that we will be able to come forward into a new and better life, that we will learn our lessons and be refined by them. Hope that we are beginning to build bridges and mend what has been broken for so long. Hope that everyone learns to value more than only themselves, and also will know their own inherent worth is absolute and unwavering—No more or less than any other.

And joy. Sweet sweet joy of existence. The simple joy of life comes into focus amidst the sharply contrasting chaos and challenges. Without the struggle, without the tangible loss, how would we know what we most care about? Struggle and loss give us clarity about what matters the most.

May we see clearly and remember long the lessons ripe for our taking. And may this be a Happy New Year with much opportunity for celebration together!

## New Dimensions Update

The theme for the 2021 stewardship campaign -- *New Dimensions* -- focused on ways to explore and think about the exciting and challenging times ahead for our Child Care Center, our Music Ministry, the Ministry with Young People and the social justice endeavors of IUCC. The Fund Development Committee encouraged each of us to think about the power of individual pledges in making a collective difference in the life of IUCC.

Members and friends of IUCC answered that challenge. At this time, we have pledges for 2021 from 122 households. Those financial pledges total almost \$419,000. There is still time to pledge at [www.iucc.org/pledge](http://www.iucc.org/pledge) or by contacting the church office at (949) 733-0220. As we plan the budget for 2021, each and every contribution will make a difference as we strive to be the church God is calling us to be and embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us.

*Renaë Boyum*

(on behalf of the members of the Fund Development Committee: Tricia Aynes, Linda Haghi, Chuck Heath, Connie Jones, Penny Portillo, Cesar Sangalang, Duane Vajgrt, and Pastor Sarah)



1/09	Jillian Allen	1/01	Kieran Mitchell
1/01	Richard Arguile	1/18	Joan Mortenson
1/13	Tricia Aynes	1/10	Barbara Ruris
1/22	Adele Bloom	1/27	Chris Sanders
1/08	Carolyn Brown	1/09	Cesar Sangalang
1/01	Emily Cordes	1/13	Bonnie Shaffstall
1/01	Paul Duncan	1/18	Bill Sheak
1/18	Felicity Figueroa	1/01	Coquelicot Shirey
1/09	Sarah Halverson-Cano	1/19	Marilyn Smith
1/23	Nancy Harris	1/02	Paul Strasma
1/05	Eric Houston	1/12	Steve Swope
1/20	Marilyn KeslerWest	1/05	Chris Walsh
1/23	Mary Lyons	1/16	Melissa Walsh
1/03	Ian McClement	1/07	Jan Wilson
1/26	Joan McDonald		

## Diversity & Inclusion Events

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2020

Presentation by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi  
 “Ethomathematics: The Study of People, Culture, and Mathematical Anthropology”

This presentation will appeal to anyone interested in the relationship between culture and learning. Themes related to diversity and inclusion in the development of mathematical thought as a way to challenge Eurocentrism will be presented in addition to the genesis of non-European mathematics inclusive of examples of mathematics from various cultures. An alternative model to the genesis of mathematical thought during the Dark Ages will also be presented.

Zoom Meeting ID: 829 2203 8914

Zoom Passcode: 319994

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020

Presentation by Mr. Ben Christy  
 “How To Unpack An Invisible Knapsack”

Ben Christy, a White man married to an African American woman with four children lives in Orange County and will be discussing, from his experience, how he had to recognize and unpack his White privilege in his own life.

Zoom Meeting ID: 880 4591 0476

Zoom Passcode: 043062

### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Presentation Description by Dr. Mark Padoongpatt  
 “Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America”

Join the IUCC Diversity and Inclusion Ministry on Saturday, February 13th, 2021 at 10:30 a.m.(Pacific Time Zone) for a Zoom talk with Q&A with Mark Padoongpatt, Ph.D. Dr. Padoongpatt is a professor and director of Asian and Asian American Studies at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. He will be talking about his book *Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America* and how US exposure to Thai food and culture is the result of various factors like US intervention in the Vietnam War, cultural appropriation, and reformed US immigration policies in the 1960s. His book is the first to give a detailed history of Thai immigration to the United States and the exposure of Thai culture to Americans.

Zoom Meeting ID: 886 4279 7633

9 Zoom Passcode: 684179

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

New women's book discussion groups will be forming again via ZOOM for 10-week sessions with three new titles to choose from. Any woman is invited to join—there will be ample room for all. Come and join the fun with great discussions among new and old women friends. Because the meetings are virtual, any woman can join, near or far, so tell a friend, and sign up! Participants may choose from these groups that will meet weekly:

- **Group 1** at 6:30–8:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, January 27 through March 31.
- **Group 2** at 1:00–3:00 p.m. Fridays, January 29 through April 2.
- **Group 3** at 1:30–3:00 p.m. Saturdays, January 30 through April 3.
- **Group 4** at 4:00–5:30 p.m. Sundays, January 24 through March 28.

Space in each group is limited, so select a first and second choice. If there is overflow, we believe we have capacity to form additional groups during these times/days. There also is a Saturday group that meets from 9 to 11 a.m., but this group is expected to continue as currently constituted and is full; however, if you would like to be on a wait list for this group, please list it as a second choice.

The selected titles for this winter session are:

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

[The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine.](#) Sue Monk Kidd. For years, the author was a conventionally religious woman. Then, in the late 1980s, she experienced an unexpected awakening and began a journey toward a feminine spirituality. With exceptional storytelling skills, Kidd tells her very personal story of the fear, anger, healing, and freedom she experienced on the path toward the wholeness that many women have lost in the church.

[Breathe: A Letter to My Sons.](#) Imani Perry. Emotionally raw and deeply reflective, Imani Perry issues an unflinching challenge to society to see Black children as deserving of humanity. She admits fear and frustration for her African American sons in a society that is increasingly racist.

However, as a mother, feminist, writer, and intellectual, Perry offers an unfettered expression of love and she exhorts her children and their peers to find courage, steady footing and inspiration in Black tradition.

[The Book of Joy.](#) The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams. This book conveys the dialogue between these two spiritual leaders during a week they spent together in the Himalayas. They share their hard-learned lessons on how to live with joy in the midst of life's sorrows. They explore how to transform joy from an ephemeral state into an enduring trait, from a fleeting feeling into a lasting way of being. (*The fall Sunday afternoon, Wednesday evening, and Saturday morning groups have read this book.*)

[Letters to My Daughter.](#) Maya Angelou. Dedicated to the daughter she never had but sees all around her, this book serves as guidebook, memoir, poetry, and pure delight. Whether she is recalling such lost friends as Coretta Scott King and Ossie Davis, extolling honesty, decrying vulgarity, explaining why becoming a Christian is a "lifelong endeavor," or simply singing the praises of a favorite meal, Angelou writes from the heart. (*The fall Friday group has read this book.*)

Here's how it works. Send an email to [iuccbooks2020@gmail](mailto:iuccbooks2020@gmail.com) listing your full name and your first and second choice for a group: (1) Wednesday 6:30–8:30pm; (2) Friday 1–3pm; (3) Saturday 1:30–3:00pm; (4) Sunday 4–5:30pm; (5) Saturday 9–11am (as a 2nd choice only). Registration will open January 3 and close on January 15. You will receive an email the week of January 18 with your assigned group. A group organizer will be selected for each group from among the registrants. If you would like to help as a group organizer (setting up the Zoom meeting, coordinating initial book selection, and encouraging each member to pick a week to lead the discussion), please include that in your email registration. We currently have four (4) potential organizers, but are always willing to share responsibilities. Additional organizers will be needed if all time slots are requested and filled.

At your first meeting in January, your group organizer will facilitate members to introduce themselves and get acquainted. Then you can reach a consensus on which of the three selected titles your group would like to read and discuss. You will also decide how to assign the weekly facilitation. You are off and running! During the pandemic shutdown, these discussion groups have become an important spiritual and social bond for IUCC women who have been able to participate. We hope you will join us!

—Lorraine Fox, Laura Long, Cindy O'Dell, and Cheryl Trobiani, Coordinators

## I Need a Map

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



The day after George died, I awoke with a bewildering thought, “What do you wear the first day after your husband dies?” Where did that mundane concern come from? Am I a shallow person? A friend gave me some insight. She believed my question actually had profound meaning: *I was asking how to be a widow.*

In many cultures, widows wear black for a month, a year, or for the rest of their lives. Widowhood defines their attire as well as their identity. I have never been a widow, but now I am. I don’t know how to *be* a widow. One thing I do know. I don’t want my identity to be wrapped up – literally or figuratively - in grief.

At times I forget that I’m a widow. When I fill out forms I automatically check “married.” Then I remember. I cross out married and check “single.” Am I really single? This soon after his death? I go for a walk, check the time and quicken my step so I can hurry home to George. Then I remember, no need to hurry. I add doughnuts to the grocery list. Then I remember. That was George’s choice, not mine. New roles take time to comprehend whether it be after a divorce, a diagnosis, or a death.

George’s death ended life as I knew it. I had been a spouse and a caregiver. Some who know me well claim I was George’s caregiver for sixty years. My niece Amy, a psychotherapist, became a caregiver when her husband was diagnosed with a serious illness. She wrote, “Caregiving is such a powerful experience of letting go, then trying to grab on and living in the moment, but then finding the moment to be more than I can manage. The patience this demands of me is refining me.”

Like Amy, I found caregiving, but also marriage, to be powerful and refining experiences. In times of contemplation parts of myself were revealed to me. Now, will dwelling in the mystery of death and widowhood take me to another level of self-revelation? When George was living, I attended a caregivers’ support group; now a group for grievers is one attempt to learn from this loss.

George’s death wasn’t traumatic, nor dramatic. It was a gentle slipping away like a canoe skimming out into a

placid lake, one paddle dip at a time. Quiet. Tranquil. That serves as a calm memory for me in my bereavement. Yet, bereavement involves many other emotions: grief, remorse, joy, fear, gratitude, anger, relief, even laughter. Laughter may be the most surprising emotion, but it is valuable for its ability to lighten one’s spirit. Our family loves to recount the funny things that George did. We laugh, not out of disrespect, but out of pure pleasure. Our spirits dance in the midst of grief.

In trying to navigate my way as a widow, Poet Jan Richardson provides some insights. She first suggests “You have looked at so many doors with longing, wondering if your life lay on the other side. For today, choose the door that opens to the inside.” Then, she wrote

Travel the most ancient way  
of all:  
the path that leads you  
to the center  
of your life.

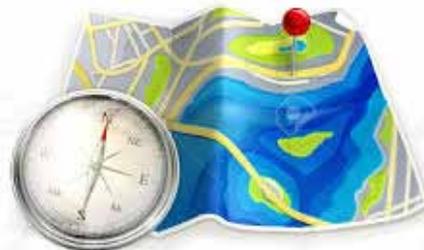
No map  
but the one  
you make yourself.\*

While Richardson’s words weren’t specifically written for grievers, they work for me. I need to make a map. I pray for the courage to look within, and then to develop a new route.

Will I have many more years of life? Maybe. Perhaps only a few. Nevertheless, I want to find meaning and purpose in this final road of life. With a map, I will put one foot in front of the other and step into the future.

I will be whole again, but I’ll never be the same. Nor do I want to be.

\*(From “The Map You Make Yourself” in [Circle of Grace](#) by Jan Richardson, 2015, Wanton Gospeller Press, Orlando, FL)



*Powerful Parenting*  
**Happy New Year?**  
*by Dr. Lorraine Fox*



I have to complete this column before January 1 so I am deprived of the insight that will be provided by the celebration behavior I've been speculating about. In just a couple of days everyone in the world, if they follow tradition, will be wishing others a "Happy New Year." But this year, everyone in the world has been dealing with events that

have brought anything but happiness. Sickness and death, separation and isolation, and financial insecurity have been the themes of every day. If we are to continue our collective struggle to "trust science" there is no reason to believe that January 1 will usher in days of health, wealth, and togetherness.

I've been wondering if this reality will change what people say to each other on New Year's Eve. We'll have to wait and see. I'm interested which of two possibilities we'll witness. One, will everyone continue the tradition of blithely wishing everyone a "Happy New Year" despite our current realities? There's a good chance that it may be so, since the greeting is a ritual and a tradition, and rituals and traditions are calming when we feel anxious. Or, will we witness each other facing our unpleasant reality and come up with more accurate well wishes for each other as we move into a year that promises continued health, relational, and financial stresses? We've been told by the experts that the new year will not be new at all. However, whichever we observe, we can use it to help our children, and ourselves at the same time.

If we witness the habitual wishes of "happiness," despite the lack of it for millions of people worldwide, we can talk to kids about rituals and why they are important, and how they help everyone, young and old, to feel a sense of calm and normalcy. Like eating "traditional" foods on holidays, saying grace before meals, using the same phrases to say good-night, using nick-names, etc. I want to suggest that you actually establish some new rituals (habits) that are COVID-related: they could be serious, like praying every day for people who are sick or for the people taking care of them, or silly, like counting jars of peanut butter, rolls of paper towels and toilet paper rolls, to assure everyone in the household that we have what we need. Rent the movie *Cider House Rules* and watch the Caregiver say the same thing every night to his collection of orphans. When

one of the news kids asks: "Why does he always say the same thing every night?" one of the long timers responds: "Because we like it."

We can also use this occasion to teach kids about "happiness." They hear the word a lot. Happy birthday. O Happy Day. Happy Hour. Happy New Year. My IUCC Book Club just finished reading *The Book of Joy*, where we learned that happiness is infinitely inferior to joy. But I don't think that means we should give up on seeking happiness. Everyone hopes for both; some people and lots of kids will settle nicely for either.

The good news is that happiness is not a "thing," so it's available to everyone, rich or poor. Happiness is a *feeling*, and everyone has feelings. Everyone has the potential for happiness. No one has to teach a baby to laugh! Happiness is a birthright, but life events can make it harder to experience. Just like some people, given their life experiences, have to work harder than others to find happiness, some events – such as our current pandemic – make it harder to find than in times of health and prosperity.

While we can't promise our children wealth or contact with friends or engagement in their hobbies, we *can* promise them the ability to find good feelings. You have probably enjoyed, as I have, all of the funny things that have been coming through on the internet to help us smile though our hearts are breaking. Share them with your kids. Encourage them to make up some funny stuff related to having to go to school at home, or visit the family on Zoom. Parents, make big deals out of little deals to produce some moments of silliness and smiles. Dig out your recording of "Keep on the Sunny Side of Life," The virus is providing the anxiety, fear, and necessity for negative change. It's up to parents to provide the antidote until the next year really becomes a new year. Crank up your phone and play "Don't Worry, Be Happy" and let Bobby McFerrin sing you into the next year.

Speaking of science, here's some good scientific news: smiling and laughing changes our body chemistry. Nature has provided us with cheap, readily available, totally legal internal "drugs" to help us feel good. Laughing stimulates endorphins, brain chemicals that give us an internal "high." Laughing is also contagious, so it's not only good for us, it's good for those around us. The pandemic is affecting the whole family in unhappy ways, it's time to infect the whole family with some endorphins!

Have a next year!

*Lorraine*

## Thinking About Family History

by Tricia Aynes

This pandemic has me thinking about family history and legacy. With so many lives being cut short by the virus, it's hard not to think about our own mortality and what we'll pass on to future generations. In the month leading up to Christmas, I decided to start typing up family history and adding old photos. It was a multi-prong project that led me down at least four paths as I looked into the lives of ancestors and tried to bring their stories to life again.

I started with the wedding journal of my husband's grandmother, Vera Lothrop Gay. Vera was still very much alive when I joined the family, and we became fast friends. I admired her immensely. She was a gifted musician who had made her living as a professional pianist at a time when few women worked outside the home. Her 100+ year old journal was a treasure, but it was old and fragile. Very painstakingly, I pored over it and deciphered her handwriting as best I could. I scanned the many photos she had included of her parents, her soon-to-be husband's parents, and herself as a young woman. When I had everything ready, I put it all together much like I put this newsletter together – in an InDesign program that can be turned into a pdf. I sent the finished product to Jim's cousins, his brother, and our daughters.

Next up was a "redo" of a family album I'd created for Jim and his cousins over 40 years ago. It too was full of family lore and old photos, many bleached by time in those sticky-backed pages we used back in the day. I was able to bring many of the photos back to life by running them through Photoshop. I put them all together in the same computer program I'd used for the initial project, turned the file into a pdf, and emailed it to the same crowd.

Our daughters had been after us for some time to write our own stories too. So I sat Jim down and had him tell me his life story. He talked, and I typed. He was a military brat (his dad was a career Marine aviator), and the family moved around a lot. It was interesting to hear how he described a life always on the move. He told his story chronologically and described all the places he had lived. It was very matter-of-fact, without much emotion involved. He told me about his time in Vietnam and the experiences

he'd had there. Again, I included old photos and turned the whole thing into a pdf. That went to the same group.

Last of all was my own autobiography. I found a 12-year-old file in my computer where I'd started this project once before. I used it as a base and went from there. My own story was markedly different from Jim's, because I'd lived in the same house for 22 years. I didn't tell it very chronologically at all: it was more of a reflection on the people who'd shaped me and flashes of experiences I remembered. My early story was surprisingly sad and lonely, or at least it seemed so by comparison to Jim's more sunny account. I was a shy and socially awkward only child with a lot to learn about human nature. Learning how to overcome my shyness and understand others became a lifelong quest, and things improved dramatically over time. I was able to say quite truthfully toward the end of the story that my early experiences were really a gift, because they provided me with empathy for others who found themselves on the outside looking in. Only my daughters received copies of that one.



The four projects were engrossing and fun, providing me with unique gifts to give the family – gifts that were easy to store, yet lasting and memorable. The time at home provided me with the space to reflect on ancestors and how their experiences had shaped the lives of our family. Jim's cousins and the daughters seemed to appreciate and enjoy the pdf "albums," and now those albums are in a format they can easily share with their own kids.

During this time of isolation, you may want to consider writing down your experiences while you have the time and patience to do so. Type it if you're able, and add photos if they're available. You will be providing your cousins, nieces and nephews, children, and grandchildren with a priceless gift of what came before them. Perhaps it can help guide what comes after them as well.

I see this newsletter in much the same way. It tells the stories of our congregation: what we did and the good times we've shared. There are narratives and photos that show our ups and our downs, our history, and our dreams for the future. I enjoy putting our newsletter together, and I hope it binds us together in shared love while serving as an important link between us during these tough times. Together, we will get through this. Stay strong, and take care, my friends. Better days are coming.

# Practicing Love in Dealing With our Enemies From the Perspective of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi  
Adult Education Ministries, and Diversity and Inclusion Task Force



The purpose of this article is to provide a perspective about understanding the practice of love in dealing with one's enemies from the point of view of the writings and speeches of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The first section of this article addresses the theme of understanding the meaning of loving one's enemies from a progressive Christian perspective.

The second section addresses difficulties concerning the applicability of loving one's enemies in dealing with personal challenges.

## Understanding the Christian Meaning of Loving One's Enemies

Within the Christian perspective it is often heard that one should love one's enemies. However, such a statement seems secularly illogical because on the surface it contradicts the natural human response of reacting against oppression or injustice. However, victimization and oppression of any one person or group of persons can sometimes create a fertile ground for an armed struggle as it has been the case, historically, when one reads about the rising of those who are oppressed in search of better social or personal conditions.

The complexity of dealing in love with those who exercise evil is perhaps unnatural because when one is either victimized or subjected to any form of evil or injustice then human nature may lead one to engage in rivalry inclusive of violent acts or of any means necessary. The perception of refraining from violent acts to deal with wrong doing, discrimination, persecution, or mandates that undermine the human spirit are not cowardly acts but rather acts of faith. The taking of matters into one's hands, especially when a social system such as government, regulations, mandates, or norms do not favor those being victimized or negatively impacted by such laws or norms seems to be a natural course of action from the perspective of the oppressed. The concept of love in dealing with transgressors according to King is grounded on peaceful resistance which may be physically passive but spiritually robust. Violence and conflict begets further violence and possibly even greater conflict and is akin to putting out a fire with gasoline. The point of loving one's enemies

does not have to do with personalizing the evil being carried out by those persons that act in an evil manner, but rather to fight an evil system. In the case of King, such an evil system was comprised of ordinances and laws that victimized and destroyed the humanness of people based solely on the color of their skin. King was clear that the goal of nonviolent protests was not to defeat or humiliate those carrying out evil acts but rather to win the opponent's friendship and understanding by bringing a sense of shame on the opponents. The love that King talked about, framed from a Christian perspective, was neither about aesthetic love nor reciprocal love between persons who are friends, but rather a love from the perspective of the greater good and the kind of love that leads to good will for all of humankind.

## Dealing With Personal Challenges From a Christian Perspective as Practiced by The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. of Loving One's Enemies

The concept of loving one's enemies is difficult because being the recipient of unkind acts or acts that are rooted in evil do cause one to deal with transgressions by defending oneself and striking back in response. The striking back at a person or group of persons engaged in evil acts or acts of oppression is unlikely to change the social dynamics of situations because instead of addressing the actual transgression or deed in the broader sense one gets led to a path of evil doing as a response to preventing any continuance of evil deeds upon the innocent who suffer. In this dilemma of oppressors versus oppressed, the question—if one is spiritually fit—that comes to mind is “does a violent act towards oppressors justify a violent response to achieve harmony and peace?” This is not an easy question to answer and the answer to such inquiry is complex and situational. Violence and tensions brought about from differences can lead to understanding and proactive action if one is willing to look at situations from the perspective of the fear of others and to gain understanding of those others caught in the acts of oppression, unkindness, or evil. The understanding of that which threatens those in power can lead to actions that can eradicate social injustices.

## Conclusion

The idea of loving one's enemies along with its challenges

provides an opportunity for thinking strategically and contemplatively about dealing with oppressive transgressions. Dealing with oppressive transgressions from a non-violent perspective is likely to lead one to seek understanding about the fear that causes people to act in an unjust manner. This understanding could commence a healing process grounded on understanding rather than personalizing the evil deed. The person doing an evil deed is not what the challenge is about, but rather the evil system or oppressive system that leads those in power to carry out evil deeds towards those whom they control.

Prejudices, hatred, and lack of compassion are rooted in fear and ignorance. The reaction of defenses against oppression followed by strikes - whether acts of violence or revengeful acts even if the ultimate goal is to seek peace and understanding - does not resonate within the Christian framework of dealing with social injustices. Such reactionary defenses against oppression are unlikely to lead to understanding and to possibly alleviate conflict.

In dealing with social injustices, especially those akin to the injustices that date back to the lifetime of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. requires spiritual strength for endurance and focus. Relying on oneself is unlikely to produce worthwhile results, and as Christians one may find refuge in the Biblical verse alluding to “(5) Trust the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; (6) In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6, NASB).”

#### **Reference**

Washington, J. M. (Ed.). (1986). *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, NY: HarperOne.

## **The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity:**

*By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...*

1. *Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;*
2. *Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;*
3. *Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: \* Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, \* Believers and agnostics, \* Women and men, \* Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, \* Those of all classes and abilities;*
4. *Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;*
5. *Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;*
6. *Strive for peace and justice among all people;*
7. *Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;*
8. *Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.*

