IUCC News & Notes
Editor: Tricia Aynes

IUCC at OC Pride Parade and Festival on June 25th!
It was a wonderful day for IUCCers to celebrate our LGBTQ+ community at OC Pride!

Photos on pages 1 and 2 courtesy of Harley Gimarino, Tricia Aynes, Pastor Sarah Halverson-Cano, Pastor Sarah Averette-Phillips, & Craig Tyrl

We marched with the members of our sister church, Brea UCC - here's a special photo of our combined teams!
It definitely feels like summer now! The sun is out, the days are long, the ocean is calling my name! I made myself a personal pledge this summer: if I’m not working, I’ll be at the beach with my kids! I realize that even an hour on the sand helps to lift my spirits while grounding me in Creation. There’s nothing like the joy experienced as my children splash in the waves. Even on days we didn’t plan on swimming, they end up soaking wet because the ocean beckons them in. There’s something magical about summer! I’m looking forward to Pilgrim Pines Summer Camp and heading back up to our sacred mountain where ladybugs whisper of God’s love and campfires sing of God’s joy. I hope you’ll find ways of experiencing the season and finding rejuvenation in God’s creation!

Last month was such a busy month for us at IUCC as we engaged with our nation and the world seeking justice amidst so much injustice. As disheartening as the news can be, I continually find hope in our church family. When we gathered together with our community on our corner the night Roe v Wade was overturned, I was struck by all the people who joined us. How many times has IUCC stood on the corner? I could recall a dozen times I’d been there over the years, but I’d never seen that many people! Nor had I ever seen that kind of reaction from the cars. The intersection was on fire with gentle angry people demanding justice, demanding the right to choose, and demanding that women and people with a uterus be given equal rights in this country. We are not alone. We have been called to be sanctuary, and I can think of no other church more ready to respond than IUCC.

The very next day we were at OC PRIDE, where our church marched in the Pride Parade. Becky Roach gave out mom hugs, while we wore our new IUCC shirts. The Communications team was on point with buttons, bags, pens, and a lot of rainbow swag! While there was a cloud of disappointment, rage and fear hanging over all of us, the rainbows shined through. Again, it reminded me of how important IUCC has been and continues to be in our community and for the LGBTQ+ community.

With all the heaviness upon us, I am hopeful that we can embrace joy this summer as we begin our summer series: The Gospel on Broadway. Beginning on July 10, we’ll be listening for God to continue to speak, or rather sing, through favorite Broadway shows! If you’re a Rent-head like me, or love the classics like the Sound of Music, if you love the twist of Wicked, and thought JC Superstar was prophetic, you’ll take a trip down memory lane and relive the favorites while looking through a theological lens. How does God speak to us in these secular shows? How is the Gospel Good News revealed? What can it mean for us today?

I’m looking forward to the Leadership Retreat on July 23 as we begin a new ministry year together. Thank you to those who have served and those who are taking on new leadership roles! We have a lot of work to do together but there will be a lot of joy and satisfaction in doing God’s work for God’s people!

Our gatherings under the sails have been so fun, and the next one will take place on Saturday morning, July 30, “Breakfast Under the Sails” which will lead into our Summer Spirit Day for kids! So start your day with your IUCC family and support our children’s ministry!

I hope you’ll find joy in God’s Creation and here at IUCC this summer! And if you’re on vacation, don’t forget to join us from wherever you are - we’re still streaming live and up on YouTube so you can tune in wherever - whenever!

   Happy Summer!

   Pastor Sarah
Photos from “Solstice Under the Sails” event on June 22

Good food, great company, and a beautiful cloud-lit sunset! Many thanks to Women’s Programs for sponsoring this terrific event! Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah & Tricia Aynes
The **Mission** of the **Legacy Circle** is to contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of IUCC:

- through will or trust bequests
- designating IUCC as a beneficiary of an IRA, 401(K), annuity or other retirement account
- designating IUCC as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy
- through other gifts such as cash, marketable securities and marketable real estate

A gift to the IUCC **Legacy Circle** by members and friends of IUCC will ensure that the goals and dreams of IUCC continue for future generations.

**IUCC Legacy Circle FAQs**

**What is planned giving?**
A planned gift can be made to IUCC through your will or trust, retirement funds, and certain life insurance policy arrangements. Planned gifts are almost always funded from accumulated resources or assets rather than income and are typically planned for during the donor’s lifetime but not actually received until after the donor’s death. Planned giving enables individuals to make sound financial plans that consider their own needs and those of family, as well as commitments to church and charities.

**Why are planned gifts important to IUCC?**
By including IUCC in your planned giving, your gift will contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of IUCC for generations to come.

**What is the Legacy Circle and how can I join?**
Anyone who establishes a legacy gift to IUCC and has completed a Confidential Bequest Intention form is automatically made a member of the **IUCC Legacy Circle**. It is our means of recognizing your lasting commitment to IUCC. If you wish to be an anonymous member, you may do so. If you have already made a legacy commitment to IUCC in your estate plan, we would love to hear from you so we are able to thank you for your generosity, make you a member of the Legacy Circle, and use the information to assist in our long-term financial planning.

**What types of legacy gifts are currently supported?**
The Legacy Circle currently supports these types of legacy gifts, including:
- Bequests to IUCC in your will or revocable trust.
- Designating IUCC as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), annuity or other retirement account.
- Designating IUCC as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.
- Other gifts such as cash, marketable securities and marketable real estate.

**Bequests**
A bequest is a provision in your will or revocable trust designating a fixed dollar amount, a percentage of your assets, or the remainder of your estate, be given to IUCC upon settlement of your estate. Most bequests are fully revocable while you are alive. Please consult an attorney with respect to the specific language requirements for your will or trust.
**Retirement Plan Beneficiary Designations**

You can designate IUCC as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), 403(b) plan, or annuity for a specific amount or a percentage of total assets. Such gifts can save on income and estate taxes. Retirement assets are subject to income taxes when paid out to a taxable entity. In contrast, nonprofit organizations such as IUCC are eligible to receive such assets without facing income tax liability. Common approaches include:

- Designating IUCC as a primary beneficiary (1 to 100 percent) of your retirement plan account.
- Designating a specific amount to be paid to IUCC before the remainder is directed to family or other individuals.
- Designating IUCC as a contingent or secondary beneficiary to receive the balance only if a loved one, such as a primary beneficiary, doesn’t survive you.

**Life Insurance Beneficiary Designations**

You can designate IUCC as a beneficiary of all or a portion of your life insurance benefits. A traditional life insurance policy (with an accumulated cash value) can be a valuable asset. If the original purpose for the protection no longer applies, such as to educate children now grown or to provide financial security for a spouse now deceased, a life insurance policy can be redirected to help support a charitable cause such as IUCC. To implement your wishes, please contact your life insurance agency or company and complete the needed change-of-beneficiary form. You may wish to contact an attorney to ensure you are using the correct language.

**Are there any restrictions on the types of gifts I can make?**

It is preferred that legacy gifts to IUCC be made without designation or restriction as to the use of the funds. IUCC may not accept gifts that are overly restrictive or difficult to administer. The types of gifts that are acceptable include cash, marketable securities, and marketable real estate. Please note that the Legacy Circle Bequest Intention Form requests that you indicate whether your gift shall be unrestricted or restricted.

**How do I make a Legacy Gift to IUCC?**

1. **Talk with your advisors and family.** Decide on the kind and amount of gift you want to leave to IUCC. Will you leave a set dollar amount or a percentage of certain assets?
2. **Complete the Confidential Bequest Intention Form** found at [https://www.iucc.org/bequestintent/](https://www.iucc.org/bequestintent/) to let us know what you are considering and whether you need assistance. While IUCC cannot offer financial or tax advice regarding your gift, we will be happy to answer your questions about the different gift types. We also want to be sure IUCC can accept your gift as you want to designate it. We may not be able to accept certain kinds of real property, or funds designated for a very narrow purpose. Of course, your information will be held in strict confidence, depending on your wishes.
3. **Execute your legacy gift by doing one or more of the following:**
   1. Work with your attorney to add or change language in your will or revocable trust.
   2. Change your retirement plan and/or life insurance beneficiary forms.
   3. Update the Confidential Bequest Intention form found at [https://www.iucc.org/bequestintent/](https://www.iucc.org/bequestintent/)
      1. Email the form to: iucc@iucc.org
      2. Send the form to Church Administrator, Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA 92604.
      3. Details on your legacy giving will be kept confidential and will be kept for the church’s record-keeping only.
4. **We will welcome you as a member of the Legacy Circle!** Determine whether or not you want your name to be listed with others or kept confidential. Please note that the form includes a checkbox to designate whether you are willing to have your name published as a member of the Legacy Circle. We recognize members by name only, and do not disclose the amount or nature of your gift. Please notify IUCC if you make future changes or adjustments to your legacy gift.
5. Upon settlement of your estate, your funds will be given to IUCC according to your wishes, and will serve the needs and activities of IUCC for years to come!

*Thank you...for your generosity and commitment to keeping IUCC strong and vital for generations to come!*
Pride Sunday at IUCC
We followed up OC Pride with Pride Sunday at IUCC! Check out the photos on page 10 to see how bright and festive it was. Special thanks to Alex Ingal for preparing rainbow-colored goodies to add to the fun!

One more “Under the Sails” event on July 30
We’ve had two very successful “Under the Sails” events so far (one in May and one in June) and both have been well-attended and lots of fun. There’s one more to go, and YOU can be there to join in! This breakfast potluck will begin at 9 a.m. on July 30 and is open to all. Bring a delicious breakfast dish to share and plan to visit with friends!

Pastor Sarah’s Installation will be September 11
Be sure to mark your calendars for this very important and festive event in the life of our church. We had to delay it due to the pandemic, but now we’re ready to do it up right! There’ll be lots of local clergy and VIPs from the conference there to help celebrate with us, plus Pastor Emeritus Fred Plumer will speak. You won’t want to miss this special event! All are welcome to attend.

Legacy Circle
IUCC has just launched the Legacy Circle, a way for members to remember the church in their estate planning. Our Fund Development Committee undertook this project as a means of providing our members with the opportunity to include IUCC in their planned giving. By including the church in your planning, you can contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of IUCC for generations to come. To learn more about how you can participate and become a member of the Legacy Circle, read the Q & As on pages 5 and 6 of this newsletter.

New A/C unit in Plumer Hall
Our ancient HVAC unit in Plumer Hall died recently, and we had to replace it. Many thanks to Tom Mason and Sandra De Anda for obtaining bids from various contractors and shepherding us through the process. The Admin Board selected one of the contractors and the unit was installed over the course of two days at the end of June.

In hope and optimism,
Tricia

From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes

Survey Says … ?
It’s here! The 2021 Congregational Survey is available and ready for you to fill out! It took longer to create and develop than we originally anticipated, but it’s worth the wait. Many thanks to Chuck Heath, Shanthi Nataraj, and Pastor Sarah for all their hard work in creating the survey and making sure it was clear, unbiased, and easy to use. We set out to determine your thoughts and feelings on several topics, and we hope the results will provide us with important information to assess your views and decide how best to proceed.

If you haven’t done so already, please take a few moments to fill it out using the SurveyMonkey link found here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7QVZDCB. If you’re not comfortable using a computer and doing it online, we’ll have printed copies available at church for you to fill out. Thanks in advance for your participation!

Orange County Pride Parade & Festival
Many thanks to all who participated in OC Pride this year. It was an awesome event - so full of joy, excitement, and celebration! I was proud to march with my fellow IUCCers and to chat with folks at our booth and tell them about our wonderfully open and affirming church. Special thanks to Alex Ingal, Harley Gimarino, Jon Ingal, and Rugee Gimarino for their meticulous planning, organization, and sheer hard work in making our IUCC presence so colorful and noteworthy.

We distributed beautiful buttons (designed by Harley), pens, totes, stickers, and beads. Alex and Jon collected over 100 emails of people who took totes with IUCC’s name on them! Our Membership Committee will follow up with those folks and see where it leads. It was a great opportunity for us to reach out to the LGBTQ+ community to show our love and support, and we had a blast!
Hello IUCCers! Over the next few months, you may notice changes to our website as well as our social media platforms. Our goal is to enhance the experience for people new to IUCC while also being useful to those who have called IUCC home for years. While we have a vision and direction for these changes, we would love to hear your thoughts.

Please contact us via our new email (talktome@iucc.org). We would love to hear your suggestions in person but also email it so we do not forget what we talked about. We are excited to transform our communications into a new, exciting direction and your input might make the difference.

Respectfully,
Your Communications Team
Alex and Harley
TalkToMe@iucc.org

I was a U.S. History Teacher. Each year I taught my students about the Vietnam War and the thousands of American soldiers who died in Vietnam. The names of those 58,000 plus soldiers are inscribed on a monument in Washington, D.C. I asked my students to think about the origin of their names and then the importance of names, not only to the person named, but also to the name-giver. Names matter!

Names matter here at IUCC, too! It’s important for you to identify yourself as a member of our faith community, AND it’s a powerful and welcoming tool for both visitors and members to IUCC. We have “new” members who may not know everyone or be known to others. We have “old” members who may not have been attending recently and may not know everyone or be remembered by others. We have visitors who can be reminded of who’s greeting them. In short, names matter! So wear your name tag EACH and EVERY Sunday. If you need a new one, sign up at the membership table and we’ll order one for you. And remember to wear your IUCC name tag proudly!

-Renae Boyum, Membership Chair

What’s in a name?
OR WEAR YOUR NAME TAG TO CHURCH!

What is it?
Installation is a joyful rite of the church where a minister is officially placed into her role as pastor of the congregation. It is a coming-together service that celebrates and acknowledges this new relationship. The installation includes special music, honored guests from the conference, and clergy from across the region. It is a welcoming ceremony to recognize the pastor’s calling, to acknowledge her duties and responsibilities, and to commemorate a new chapter in the life of the congregation.

Why are we doing it now?
Even though Pastor Sarah has been here for some time, her installation has been delayed due to the pandemic -- it’s like we got married without the wedding and now we finally get to party! We’re excited to invite back our Pastor Emeritus, the Rev. Fred Plumer, as a special guest.

Please come - all are invited!
IUCC members and guests are cordially invited to attend and join in the ceremony!

-IUCC members and guests are cordially invited to attend and join in the ceremony!
Some of our IUCC women at Laguna Niguel Park at their first in-person meeting of 2021

Hey, IUCC Women!

Wouldn’t it be fun to get together with your IUCC sisters about once a month for an enriching social activity?! We think so, and we have brainstormed several ideas:

- a walk in a local park or green belt
- happy hour on the beach
- a trip to a local garden with lunch afterwards
- excursion to an art museum
- potluck dinner or luncheon
- holiday party
- or almost anything else!

To make anything happen, though, we need help. If you can assist to organize a get-together, please email us at iuccwomen22@gmail.com. Many hands make light work, and we promise lots of support to get it done. You pick the time/day/month, activity details, and we’ll work on the logistics, such as publicity and sign-ups. We would love to get some events on the calendar as soon as possible.

Also, the Women’s Book Discussion Groups will be reorganizing in the fall. Watch for details the end of August or early September. If you already know you want to be a part of them, email your preferred time/day/meeting frequency and any book ideas you may have to the same address: iuccwomen22@gmail.com

Let’s get together, sisters!

*Marilyn Smith, Pat Sauter, Cindy O’Dell, and Laura Long*

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**Jan Osborne Memorial Service**
**Saturday, July 16 at 10 a.m.**

The congregation is invited to attend the Memorial Service of longtime IUCC member Jan Osborne, who died on Monday, April 18, 2022 after a long battle with cancer. She and her husband Brian had moved north to be with her daughter Susan, but were planning to return to Irvine and IUCC. When Jan learned of her prognosis, she boldly and bravely met it, surrounding herself with those she loved, proclaiming that love, and ensuring that they knew she was all right. She died with dignity and grace.

The service will be held on Saturday, July 16, at 10 a.m. in the IUCC sanctuary.

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At its June 21 meeting, the Admin Board endorsed the return of handshakes/handholding, red books, and offering plates. Craig Tyrl and his intrepid team of deacons were quick to implement the new policy!
SPECIAL INTERACTIVE CLASS
A Beautiful Symmetry Between Existentialism and Progressive Christianity

What will it cover?
This class will be led by Pastor Sarah and Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge and will discuss the following topics:

What is existentialism and why should it matter?

How existentialism supports and enhances the 8 points of Progressive Christianity (supports and enhances our lives)

For some, existentialism can support making sense of our lives, and giving purpose, meaning and value to our lives.

When will it be offered?
Participants may attend either of two sessions:

Wednesday afternoons from 2-3:30 p.m. on August 10, 17, 24, and 31

OR

Thursday nights from 7-8:30 p.m. on August 11, 18, & 25 and September 1.

These classes will have Zoom capability but in-person attendance is preferable.

Reefa celebrates her birthday with the Seekers on June 21st.
Photos from PRIDE Sunday at IUCC on June 26!

Photos courtesy of Harley Gimarino & Tricia Aynes
The message was driven home; when you walk through those doors, you bring only yourself.” - Paula D’Archy

As many of us begin our tenure as new leaders of different ministries and committees, we are looking into the congregation to recruit members to help us succeed in our new positions. Because no one should have to serve alone, and it does our spirit good to serve. This also means that you all get to go shopping for what you might be interested in when it comes to volunteering! After all, it really is true that it takes a village to lean in and serve each other for a village to flourish. Service is an important part of being a church member, and everyone helping to make a difference makes a BIG difference. We should all be looking to see where we are needed or have an interest and then be able to have some fun and/or fulfillment doing it while getting to know each other.

Irish poet, author, and priest John O’Donohue reflected on the value of work when we are intentional about our choices - that it is our deeper self that we bring. This is especially true with service work and volunteering within a church community:

“The invisible within us finds a form and comes to expression. Therefore, our work should be the place where the soul can enjoy becoming visible and present. The rich unknown, reserved, and precious within us, can emerge in visible form.”

In her book, In Sacred Thresholds, Paula D’Arcy talks about the importance of bringing our authentic self to our work no matter what kind of work it is, professional or volunteer. To bring, “Who we really are.” Because no matter what kind of service we offer to give, the most valuable gift we bring is our self. The more we can leave open space to do that and learn from what we find there, the deeper our spiritual connection to each other will be.

Joyce Rupp, spiritual guide and author shares in her book, Open the Door; that “We go humbly, no longer hiding behind the careful defense of our persona. We enter our work knowing there is much to receive from others, as well as give to them. We set out with the power of the Holy One alive and resilient in us, a union that strengthens our sense of self being and our ability to bring our inner goodness into occupation.”

She goes on to say, “Work changes into service when we view it as more than something that has to be done, when it becomes a way for our authentic self to transmit integrity, kindness and justice to our world.” This concept really appeals to me. And we are all looking for a place to be helpful, but we are not always sure what we want to do or have time to do or have experience or knowledge to do. It has been a vastly different time in our world. Sometimes we may feel inadequate or unworthy of work someone thinks we will be ideal for, and we do not want to disappoint. I ask that you just bring yourself along and not let any of these things get in the way. This is a special time in the life of our church, and we are all a part of how we make that happen moving forward.

Carol Osborn, artist, spiritual guide, and author offers us a prayer as we reflect on these things that I want to share:

“So, God, I ask you to use me, anyway. Take my fears and use me, anyway. Take my failures and use me, anyway. Take my arrogance and use me, anyway. Take my greed and use me, anyway. Take my guilt and use me, anyway. Take my confusion and use me, anyway. Take my regret and use me, anyway. I offer all of myself to you. Use me to serve many or few. In pain or in joy. Use me as you will.”

There is a place for all to serve in some way, whether it is in small or bigger ways. There is a way to lean in. We might not feel we have something, but we do. Jesus always saw more in the disciples than they knew was there. Jesus was not concerned with perfection as much as he wanted to inspire followers to care for one another. We already do a good job of this at IUCC. Now as we move back to being able to be together in physical form rather than just online and zoom, it is vital we all find a place or a willingness to say yes, when asked to join or take part in something.

As Joyce Rupp says in Open the Door, “Let us go to be of service to others with our strengths and limitations, trusting that God will take the best of who we are and bless others with it.” And let us also remember that Jesus performed few miracles but the first one was turning water into wine; he clearly loved a party. Me too, and if you do too, Fellowship ministry might just be the place for you!

Whatever you choose to do or help with or attend, I pray you will choose something. Because the truth of it is that it really does take a village for us all to feel connected and remain a healthy spiritual home for each other and others who come our way.
The Early Childhood Center (ECC) is an important service to the community, and the congregation may be proud of that. Our programs for kids have been absolutely exemplary in the face of all of the perturbances that COVID, in particular, have brought. Kids have been nurtured and served while our staff observed every health and safety protocol. Our clients, our parents, offer strong reviews.

That marvelous work noted, however, IUCC must also pay attention to financial details. Over the years, IUCC has greatly relied on net income from the ECC as a means of making the congregational budget. The ECC went from a posture of strong contributions to the congregation, well above budget in 2019, to reporting net losses in 2020 and 2021. Generous federal government aid helped IUCC to bridge the lean years, and in the twelve months since the 2021 Spring Congregational Meeting, enrollments, and financial health, have gradually seen improvements.

Here are just a few details. In April of 2022 we enrolled 55 kids, up from just 38 in April of ’21. (In COVID times we enrolled many fewer: just 25 in October of 2020, for example.) So that is a good number for us, and is beginning to approach our state licensing limit of 61 children. And with that “pretty good” number, in April of 2022 the ECC financially out-performed the very cautious budget that the congregation adopted in January of this year. Things have continued on a good basis as we now enter the summer months when enrollments typically dip somewhat. Here are some numbers to illustrate recent performance:

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<th>Month</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
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<td>44</td>
<td>($424)</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>$12,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>$16,156</td>
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<tr>
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<td>54</td>
<td>$10,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>$8,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(not yet calculated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a pleasure, therefore, to report that, all in all, we are doing better; and in the next year or so the ECC should be positioned to make a positive contribution to IUCC’s overall financial picture. Part of the good news is that we can now serve younger kids, toddlers in the 6-24 month age range. With them in the picture we may approach our licensing enrollment ceiling, which is financially where we want to be.

Planning for 2023 and beyond is very challenging, however. The state of California plans to serve four year-old “Pre-K” kids through the public school system, and child care centers like ours will therefore lose clients in that age range. Another challenge in these economic times is hiring: preschool teachers are hard to find. The Child Care Center Committee is working to make plans for the future, given these circumstances, and the Child Care Center Committee expects to make recommendations to the Administration Board about how best to move forward.

Meanwhile, our Child Care Center staff serve kids and their families in absolutely exemplary ways, and we commend Director Irma Rosales and all of our teachers; and we offer thanks also to Pastor Sarah for her leadership. Our church Administrator along with Bookkeeper Heidi Wilcox also offer strong and timely support. - Keith Boyum
**BACK TO SCHOOL**

Low-Income Students Need Your Help With Back to School Supplies

**Mission & Service** is once again collaborating with **Families Forward** to give every student the same “Back to School” experience. Grade-appropriate school supplies will be distributed to low-income elementary, middle, and high school students in August helping them to start on the same foot as their peers and building their confidence for the coming school year.

**MOST NEEDED ITEMS**

- Sturdy 17" Backpacks with pocket for laptop/Chromebook
- Binders
- Dividers
- Lined Paper
- Pocket Folders
- Glue Sticks
- Liquid Glue
- Sharpies
- Highlighters
- Index Cards
- Journals
- Thin Markers
- Graph Paper
- Dry Erase Markers
- Pencil Sharpeners
- Erasers
- Mechanical Pencils
- Pencil Box/Zipper Bag
- Red and Blue Pens
- Rulers
- Protractors
- Student Scissors

**Donations will be accepted beginning Sunday, July 3rd**

until Tuesday, July 26th

In-person donations can be dropped off in front of the Church

Monday - Thursday ~ 9:30 am - 4

Sundays ~ 9:00 am - Noon
Save the Date!
Summer Spirit Day, Saturday, July 30th

Take a Walk With Jesus! We’re back with a day of fun, service, & inspiration for kids and youth - tentative time 10am-2pm. Our plan is to have the kids visit tables and stamp their “passports” for each table they learn about/participate with a new kind of service project. More details to come!

Special Summer Series - starting mid July!

Sunday School will be hosting a special character series starting July 17th! Kids Sunday School meets during First Service (kids are escorted to Sunday School after The Fresh Word segment around 9:45am).

Seeking Sunday Helpers

We are looking for volunteers to help with Sunday! Team up with the Sun School teacher or our child care specialist and hang out with the growing kids of IUCC. Email Lauren (LLouie735@gmail.com) or Myrna (myrnabohan@gmail.com) to learn more!

Join the Emergency Helper List!

Can’t help out regularly but able to jump in in a pinch? Sometimes things fall through and we need a person who can help with child care or supervision. → Learn more by emailing Lauren (LLouie735@gmail.com) or Myrna (myrnabohan@gmail.com)!
Some people are unforgettable. I’ll never forget Herman and Lizzie, a couple that I suspect were stuck together with Velcro. They were the kind of couple that did everything as a twosome. When I saw one, I knew the other was close by. They shopped and banked and went to the post office as a duet. They sat as a unit in the same pew at church every Sunday. That’s where I met them.

Herman, a man in his sixties, had a ruddy complexion, a scruffy beard, beady dark eyes and thinning hair that he combed forward. Though I never saw him smoke, I always detected an aroma of tobacco in his presence. He was gruff in speech and manner but appeared to treat Lizzie with kindness. Lizzie’s large blue eyes and permed white hair lent a softness to her appearance in spite of her long, pointed nose and chin. She, like Herman, was short in stature and wide in girth. Whenever they approached, marshmallows came to mind. Actually, roasted marshmallows, due to a plethora of wrinkles on their sunbaked skin in addition to their body shapes.

As pleasant as they were, I did find their earned reputation of talking one’s ears off inconvenient at times. On one occasion when I was short on time, I spied them an aisle over in the grocery store. I’m not proud of my behavior, but I’ll be honest and tell you that I covertly hid behind a display of canned peaches in order to avoid a half-hour of conversation.

One Sunday, Herman and Lizzie stood in the narthex of the church where they waited to shake the pastor’s hand following the worship service. I, the wife of the pastor, stood on the patio to greet and converse with people. As Herman and Lizzie entered the patio, I noted that Lizzie had her soft-leather very large Bible draped over her forearm, her customary accessory on Sundays. Her other arm was snuggly hooked around Herman’s arm. I watched as they pushed past other people and made a beeline towards me.

Lizzie’s pinched face alerted me to her distress. “What’s wrong, Lizzie?” I asked with a genuinely sympathetic voice. “My brother-in-law died.” She gulped her words and then added, “I’m so upset.”

Seeing her sadness, I touched her arm and said, “I’m sorry, Lizzy. Will you be able to attend the memorial service?” “Well, no. That’s why I’m so sad. They already had the service and we didn’t go ’cuz . . .” Her big blue eyes became a pond. “He died four weeks ago. They didn’t even tell me that he died. Not until yesterday.” Lizzie’s voice cracked as tears dripped off her cheeks. “We didn’t go . . . ’cuz we didn’t know he died. They didn’t tell us!”

I felt so bad for her and offered some words of comfort. Herman, obviously stressed over Lizzie’s sadness, clumsily put his arm around her shoulder. Then with the softest voice he could muster, he said, “That’s okay, Lizzie. When you die, I’m not going to tell them!”

I stared at Herman as I let his words sink in. What comfort could his words possibly bring? With a loud voice, he added, “That’ll teach them a thing or two.” He punctuated his words with a gruff “Humpff” that underscored he was pleased with his plan.

Worried that his brand of comfort would exacerbate Lizzie’s sorrow, I looked at her with empathy. Amazingly, Lizzie’s tight mouth loosened and she gave a gentle nod as she clutched her Bible to her chest. (A book, I might add, with a strong emphasis on forgiveness.) I was totally confused with Herman’s brand of empathy, but it appeared that Lizzie found it comforting to have a “supportive” spouse like Herman. She reached for his arm and off they went, leaving a lingering whiff of tobacco.

Shortly after that episode we moved away, never to see them again. But as I said, some people are unforgettable.
Well, the dog days are here again. That time of year when a small sheen of sweat causes your clothes to stick to your body. Simply air conditioning your home costs $150 a month and the mere presence of a beach bunny reminds you that you’re no teenager anymore. Oh, the misery.

Well, as an antidote to this misery I’m offering you a list of films that have the word “summer” in their titles. The titles alone should generate some relief, shouldn’t they? So grab a glass of lemonade, unfold the lawn chair and...enjoy!

1) **Summer Stock** (Charles Walters – 1950) – The classic Judy Garland, Gene Kelly musical about summer theatre. “Forget your troubles, come on, get happy.”

2) **Early Summer** (Yasujirō Ozu – 1951) – In this post-WW2 drama, a young woman risks the disappointment of her family by making her own decisions.

3) **Sommaren med Monika/Summer with Monika** (Ingmar Bergman – 1953) – A working-class boy learns the rudiments of love from Monika, an adventurer.

4) **Sommarnattens leende/Smiles of a Summer Night** (Ingmar Bergman - 1955) – A middle-aged lawyer learns that love, like wine, tastes best when it’s aged a bit. The source of Sondheim’s classic musical *A Little Night Music*.


6) **A Summer Place** (Delmer Daves - 1959) – Young love blossoms on the upper-class coast of Maine. Arrived when sexy films like *Peyton Place, Baby Doll* and Tennessee Williams’ things were all the rage.

7) **Suddenly, Last Summer** (Joseph L. Mankiewicz - 1959) – A N’awlins story by Tennessee about love, memory and madness. Stars Liz Taylor, Monty Clift and the endlessly surprising Katie Hepburn.

8) **The End of Summer** (Yasujirō Ozu – 1961) – A story that pits the will of a young Japanese woman against the social and economic power of her family.

9) **Summer and Smoke** (Peter Glenville - 1961) – Another by Tennessee Williams. A shy preacher’s daughter lives out a troubled romance with a good-timing doctor.

10) **The Endless Summer** (Bruce Brown – 1966) – The classic surfing documentary using footage from around the world. As thrilling today as it was in 1966.

11) **Summer of ’42** (Robert Mulligan – 1971) – An Academy Award nominee about that one summer when life begins to make sense.

12) **Summer of Sam** (Spike Lee – 1999) – Mr. Lee’s take on the summer David Berkowitz took over the New York nightlife.

13) **Summer Wars** (Mamoru Hosoda - 2009) – Anime for the science fiction lover.

14) **500 Days of Summer** (Marc Webb - 2009) – Joseph-Gordon-Levitt tries to figure out the difference between romance and love.

Next month...who knows?
I am angry and I have the same feeling Jesus had when he turned the tables at the Temple, the House of Prayer. Anger is a human emotion, and I am “table-flipping angry!” I believe that body autonomy is a human right, and in my view such right is God-given. I also believe that God loves people regardless of their choice to either continue or terminate a pregnancy, and in light of that, women have an inalienable right to shape the direction of their lives as they see fit without external socio-political pressure.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision to vacate the fifty year precedent in protecting a woman’s rights to choose represents a continual effort to oppress women. This decision, in my view, will disproportionately affect people of color as well as women in low-income areas as a function of facing challenges in accessing medically-supervised health care inclusive of abortions.

What does this mean? Basically, millions of American women will be stripped of their constitutional right to self-determination, privacy, and bodily autonomy under the law. For me this is a historically painful moment, and it causes me to have so many feelings that cannot be expressed in a single word but rather an unbounded collection of words—anger, fear, hopelessness, dissolution, and so much more. However, I find some comfort in the words from the Apostle Paul “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, NRSV) but at present this is not enough. My heart is with women everywhere and with all those who face the recent news with fear, uncertainty, and despair.

Communities of color are already over-policed and criminalized and, sadly, they will be very likely to bear the brunt of this deplorable decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. The ones who will suffer the most, in my opinion, are going to be those from the rural communities in the South and Midwest because they will be forced to travel hundreds of miles at great expense for crucial and life-saving care. These voiceless people already struggle to make ends meet while being unable to take time off from work to obtain safe and legal abortions and thus chart the course of their own lives. I believe that every woman and every person has the right to determine their own destiny and to shape their family and future with privacy, dignity, and autonomy.

Without reproductive justice and gender equality, there can be no economic justice, no racial justice, and no LGBTQIA+ or disability justice. Reproductive freedom is essential to freedom everywhere. The decision by the U.S. Supreme Court is a reminder that progress is not linear—the work of justice demands sustained effort and vigilance. As progressive, open and affirming Christians, we must do all we can to forge ahead in whatever way we can with a spirit of righteous resistance and resolve. The U.S. Supreme Court may have spoken, but let us keep in mind that the arc of the moral universe is long and we the people will once again bend it toward justice. Women matter and we must not let a tiny ruling minority tell us differently.

Women and the love of one another are stronger than government. A woman’s right is not subject to debate. This is indeed a historically painful moment because the decision to reverse the fifty-year precedent will cause disproportionate harm to women. I believe that the Supreme Court’s decision is a threat to same-sex marriage, birth control, racial civil rights and fair voting policies.

Finally, the issue of whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy is not an either/or argument. The decision by the U.S. Supreme Court is nothing more that a false dilemma because the decision and right of a woman to continue or terminate a pregnancy is complex and the reasons for such a decision are akin to the choices between the extremes of A and Z, when between the two extremes are a multiplicity of options B, C, D, etc.

So where do we go from here? We all have ways to deal with being “table-flipping angry,” and there is no one right way to address this terrible moment in our nation’s history. I urge you to do whatever you can to take care of yourself and to act with courage and determination to do justice, love kindness, and walk with the God of our understanding (cf. Micah 6:8).
There are many reasons why people go to church. It can be that they enjoy the music, like the sermons, enjoy the people in fellowship, or there is a good Sunday school program for their children. The mega churches have a smorgasbord of social activities, which is good and fine, but even mega churches are in decline because of their failure to meet the basic existential needs that all people have.

Digging deep, people go to church because of a deep hunger that is hardwired into the human psyche. They seek truth - truth that enables them to make sense of their lives and give them meaning, purpose, and value. They are also seeking kinship with like-minded people. Since the dawn of history, humankind has sought truth. The expression of this journey is reflected in many books, plays, poetry, music and some movies. Today’s rap music, coming primarily from the Black experience, represents this hunger for truth, meaning, purpose and value.

Some churches offer the truth as they see it. People no longer have to search for truth: to learn, to seek, to grow and to be open to new truths. All of the answers to life are rolled up into one simplistic formula: “Believe in the blood of Jesus Christ and be saved.” Some Christian churches say that “if you don’t believe in Jesus, you’ll go to hell,” and/or “Christianity is the only religion that will take you to God.” Catholicism has said that if you don’t believe in Catholic doctrine, you will go to hell.

There is a history in Christianity of councils and creeds telling people what to believe. These forms of Christianity ultimately say that God will take care of everything, relieving us of the responsibility to search, to struggle, to make sense, and to add value to our lives. It is a comfortable Christianity in which people give up their autonomy (or perhaps some of their autonomy) in order to feel a false sense of security.

Mainline Christianity has always offered some form of the truth in doctrines and creeds. Fundamentalist churches and mega churches today offer a much stronger form of the truth, with the consequence that people experience an increasing loss of autonomy. Some people want to be told what to believe and what to do, to have life all figured out and reduced to a simplistic religious formula, like believing that we are saved by Jesus.

In his 2018 book, Unbelievable, John Shelby Spong states that the exponential increase in knowledge over the last 500 years has rendered most of what is said by the church today outdated and unbelievable. He says that Christianity must change or die. He is adamant that we must give up on having the truth. We must also give up much of our current concepts and language regarding God and Jesus, opening up to new truth to what God is and who Jesus is. We must go from surety to searching, looking for truth.

Progressive Christianity embraces many of the ideas expressed by Spong. There is no absolute truth, only truths to be discovered in a lifelong spiritual journey. There are many roads, many different religions, and many spiritual practices that lead to God. Christianity, with a main focus on Jesus, is but one of the ways of relating to the entity that we call God. There is a humbleness to this approach, as well as an openness to new ideas and new truth that comes to us as we explore life, each on our individual journey.

Progressive Christianity places more value on the search itself - on seeking - than on a body of knowledge (theology or creeds) that we might have. Our learning is experiential and subjective: each person learns truth from their own experiences, which gives meaning, purpose, and value to their lives.

There is a remarkable symmetry between Progressive Christianity and Existentialism

Both Progressive Christianity and existentialism are basically saying the same thing: there is no absolute truth and there are no “givens.” The truth simply does not exist. We search for truth, knowing that it is only a sliver of reality - that we have not captured reality itself. We continue to search, to grow, and to be open to new learning and new insight.

Existentialism looks at the human condition by focusing on human existence and experience. It focuses on subjective learning from both that experience and our self-creation from decisions and actions we take, creating our own life, with its own meaning, purpose, and value. Albert
Camus has said that we must “give the void its colors.” Our lives may have many voids, or one big void. Each of us has a spiritual void representing our need for meaning, purpose, and value in our lives. We color the voids in our lives, meeting some of our needs, through how we choose to perceive and to act in life situations. Through a series of perceptions and actions, we create our lives in an ongoing, lifelong process. This is the journey described by Progressive Christianity.

Existentialism (Sartre) encourages us to have both courage and lucidity in approaching life. That means to make sure we see things as clearly as possible, recognizing the slice of reality that we see, and to be bold in facing life and making decisions. Accuracy of perception is critical for any decision-making. Sartre said that we are condemned to freedom, which means we have the responsibility to create our own lives. It takes a lot of courage to look at life clearly and to make life-determining decisions. It takes a lot of courage to be totally responsible for our own lives.

Some people shy away from this responsibility. They may join fundamentalist churches that relieve them of this life challenge. They make only one decision that allows them to stop making life decisions, to no longer be responsible for their own life. Everything is left up for God to do.

Authenticity comes from knowing the truth and reflecting the true self, which is fluid rather than fixed and static.

Diversity and Progressive Christianity
Diversity is supported and encouraged by Progressive Christianity. Diversity is important here at IUCC. Diversity teaches us many different truths - about false stereotypes and false barriers, and about the corrosiveness of racism and other forms of marginalization that keep people from relating to each other.

We experience truth: that all people are more alike than they are different, that all people are brothers and sisters, and that all people are children of God. Existentialism, expressed by Sartre (the concept of the other), supports diversity by being against racism and other negative elements in society.

People will go to church for meaning, purpose and value for their lives, and to experience kinship
I think that Spong is right. In order to survive, Christianity must change. It must learn and be able to communicate new truth - truth that helps individuals make more sense of their lives and helps give their lives greater meaning, purpose, and value. This means developing a new language and a new theology that are rooted in the existential experience common to all of us, each of us on our own journey. Our journeys differ, but the main existential themes will be the same. The experience of kinship will come from individuals sharing their truths with like-minded individuals. The benefit of this experience will be mutual support and affirmation. This kinship will foster further knowledge and understanding and Increase individual empowerment.