Holly Jolly Advent Events at IUCC on December 3rd

JOHN ADVENT WORKSHOP
Saturday, December 3rd

JOIN US FOR IUCC’s ANNUAL FUN AND CRAFTY ADVENT WORKSHOP!
CRAFTS FOR KIDS AND ADULTS!
3PM-5PM
SNOW TIME: 4PM-5PM
FOLLOWED BY THE ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF
Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA 92604 www.iucc.org

graphic courtesy of Myrna Bohan

The Irvine United Congregational Church
Chancel Choir presents:

HAVE A holly Jolly Christmas
Saturday, December 3, 2022
7:00 pm
Irvine United Congregational Church
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA 92604

graphic courtesy of Chris Peterson
Quick & Easy Guide to IUCC Events in December

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<th>Ongoing:</th>
<th>Collecting Toiletries for Incarcerated Women</th>
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<td>1st week of December:</td>
<td>Families Forward Holiday Giving Program (drop off items by Dec. 5)</td>
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<td>Saturday, December 3:</td>
<td>3-5 p.m. Advent Workshop</td>
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<td>4 p.m. Snow Time</td>
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<td>5 p.m. Chili Cook-Off</td>
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<td>7 p.m. Choir Concert</td>
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<td>Sunday, December 4:</td>
<td>Children’s Choir sings both services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Concern America’s Marketplace (between services &amp; after 2nd service)</td>
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<td>Sunday, December 18:</td>
<td>Christmas Pageant (both services)</td>
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<td>Saturday, December 24:</td>
<td>Christmas Eve Service at 7 p.m. (note: one service only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, December 25:</td>
<td>Christmas Day Service at 10 a.m. (note: one service only)</td>
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PLEASE LOOK FOR EVENT DETAILS THROUGHOUT THIS NEWSLETTER - WE HOPE YOU CAN PARTICIPATE!

IUCC Children Sing in Church Both Services Dec. 4, Arrive at 9 a.m.

Ms. Wendy Wiebach, Director, coordinated by Ms. Martha Mecartney

What fun is planned for this Advent Season! Our IUCC Sunday Morning Children Singers will be singing our carols on **Sunday, Dec. 4, at both services.** You will not want to miss this! Please bring your child(ren) to church at **9 a.m. Sunday Dec. 4** so we can practice in the sanctuary before church starts. **We will all wear masks.** We will get to sit in the big chairs up front and sing one of our carols for an introit and another two for the anthem. Then we will leave (our singing is in lieu of the Fresh Word) to go to Plumer Hall for a waffle breakfast (no nuts or sesame, eating outside). We will also have playtime on the playground to let off steam. We will also sing for second service at 11 a.m., then after our anthem go to Plumer Hall for Advent Play practice, written specially by Ms. Myrna Bohan with parts for our children to be performed in church Dec. 18. Look for some more singing on Dec. 18 too! So, here are some takeaways.

1. Please plan on the children being at IUCC **Sunday Dec. 4 from 9 a.m. to noon**, with waffle brunch provided. (Maybe time for Xmas shopping.) Children will wear masks.
2. **If you have a waffle maker we can use**, please contact Martha martham@uci.edu or text her **949-293-8113**. Bring to Plumer Hall after you drop off children in sanctuary at 9 a.m.
3. If your child is hesitant about singing, we just ask them to join their friends up front as everyone has been getting into the hand signs, but of course they may stay with their parents instead. Every child is welcome to join us. This is such a gift to the congregation.

If you have questions, contact Martha at 949-293-8113 or martham@uci.edu
More Christmas Opportunities at IUCC

Poinsettia Sponsorship

Here is your opportunity to sponsor a poinsettia to honor, celebrate, or memorialize a person or an event.
Sign up after service for a $12 donation.
Your sponsorship will help put the finishing touches on our sanctuary decorations.
Sponsors are welcome to take their poinsettia home after service on Christmas Day!

graphic courtesy of Craig Tyrl

Look Up
Christmas Pageant @ Irvine UCC
Dec 18th 9:30am & 11:00am
All kinds of open parts for all ages!

graphic courtesy of Myrna Bohan
IUCC and University Synagogue celebrated their 34th Annual Shared Service of Thanksgiving on November 18th

Photos courtesy of Tricia & Jim Aynes
IUCC leaders are aware that mask wearing is a controversial topic. The Admin Board has discussed this issue at length for months trying to balance the desire to protect our most vulnerable members with the very human desire to stop wearing masks. At its October 17 meeting, the Admin Board voted to implement all suggested precautions from the CDC and state and county health agencies with regard to masking while in the sanctuary. As of December 1, 2022, masking will be required only when any of these agencies recommend masking. Otherwise, masking will be optional, but encouraged. This means that - barring a spike in cases that warrants more cautious measures - IUCC will make masks optional (but encouraged) in the sanctuary starting December 1. We request that people stay home if they have a communicable illness such as a cold or a flu.

Dear fellow IUCC friends,

Though the formal stewardship pledge drive was completed with Pastor Sarah’s blessing of the pledges on Sunday, November 13, we are still far short of reaching our critical goal of $400,000 which even then will result in a very tight budget for 2023. To date, $363,248 has been raised.

We truly need everyone’s participation to bridge that gap of approximately $37,000. So we beseech you, if you have not yet pledged, please do so ASAP. Here’s the link: https://www.iucc.org/giving/pledge/

If you have already pledged and can do so, please consider increasing your pledge. For those who cannot reasonably make the commitment of a pledge for 2023, please consider an end-of-year donation after assessing your finances this month.

We really don’t want to hound anyone. However, this is so critical for the financial well-being of our church that it is necessary to persist in soliciting pledges. We don’t want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. We hope you understand. We only want to ensure that IUCC can BE THE CHANGE that is needed in our world.

With concern,

Connie Jones
Duane Vajgrt
Co-chairs, Fund Development Committee

Request your date at iucc@iucc.org
From the Moderator

by Tricia Aynes

We’ve barely caught our breath since that yummy Thanksgiving dinner, and the Christmas shopping frenzy is already upon us! Americans are projected to spend a record amount of money on gifts this year, and malls are full of bright lights, carols, and decorations. People are anticipating Christmas in a big way this year.

I’m looking forward to celebrating the holidays with family, especially the two little guys shown above. What a joy (and what a huge upheaval) it has been to welcome a new grandchild to the family! Baby Luke is keeping us all busy with his nocturnal crying, frequent feedings, and dirty diapers. I’ve been trying to help my daughter out as much as I can with the baby and his older brother Blake. At almost 3 months old, Luke is starting to respond to us more and more every day, and we are putty in his hands when we are able to elicit one of his cute baby smiles.

Thanksgiving Service with University Synagogue

I hope you had a chance to attend our annual Thanksgiving Service with University Synagogue. We’ve participated in this important tradition for 34 years now, and the friendship between our two congregations remains as strong and vital as ever - a wonderful touchstone. As is our custom, we went around the sanctuary and highlighted all the things we’re thankful for. In the midst of so many setbacks this year, it was nice to focus on some good things that happened as well.

I found it so interesting to hear our own Pastor Sarah and US’s Rabbi Rachlis engage in a fascinating dialogue about “What you always wanted to know about Judaism and Christianity but were afraid to ask.” Between that and the beautiful music of our combined choirs, it was an evening to remember. You can see some of the photos of the service in this newsletter on page 4.

Advent

Advent is already underway! This year, it started on November 27 and will end on December 24. Advent starts the season of the liturgical year dedicated to anticipating the birth of Jesus. The most common Advent tradition involves the lighting of four candles. As we light each one, we reflect on the past and anticipate what is to come, taking time to contemplate what the four candles traditionally represent: hope, faith, joy, and peace. We need all four more than ever before!

Holly Jolly Advent Events

This coming Sunday, December 3, IUCC will celebrate Advent in a big way. We’ll have an Advent Workshop, a chili cook-off, and a Snow Run! That evening, we’ll enjoy a lovely concert featuring our own Chancel Choir. I hope you’ll come for part or all of it to get into the spirit of Christmas!

Stewardship

You’ve probably noticed a big focus on church finances lately. We’ve just wrapped up our stewardship campaign, and we’re still short of the goal we’d hoped to reach. If you haven’t pledged, please do so as soon as you can.

Towards the end of December, you’ll receive an end-of-the-year appeal letter from us. We’d appreciate any help you can provide.

Winter Congregational Meeting on January 29, 2023

Please mark your calendar now for our upcoming Winter Congregational Meeting on January 29 after second service. The meeting will be held electronically via Zoom per majority vote of both boards. We’ll be voting on the 2023 budget. We can’t conduct the important business of this meeting without a quorum, so your attendance is especially important. Please plan to attend!

This has been quite a year. I hope you have a blessed Christmas, my friends. May God smile down on our congregation and our world and give us health, joy, and peace in the new year.

In hope and optimism,

Tricia
Early Childcare Center “Refresh” is Underway!

Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah
Yes, we’re collecting again this year! IUCC will be participating with other local churches to fill plastic bags with toiletries for the incarcerated women at the CIW at Chino. We hope to deliver care baskets to bring some joy to the ladies, so please keep saving small travel size bottles of shampoo, conditioner, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, and wrapped candy canes. We will continue this collection until we have enough bags to give to everyone, so there is no cut-off time for donations.

-- Felicity Fgueroa for the Mission & Service Ministry

On November 13, about 25 IUCC members attended a post-election forum sponsored by the Advocates for Peace and Justice. They had two political scientists on hand to offer viewpoints and to answer questions: Graeme Boushey, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine, and IUCC member Keith Boyum, who is emeritus Professor of Political Science at California State University, Fullerton. Dave Smith served as facilitator. It was an informative and lively meeting with lots of good discussion! Our thanks to the Advocates for providing this timely forum.

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**Toiletries for Incarcerated Women**

**Preschool Refresh**

Can you help with our Preschool Refresh?

While most of us haven’t been in the preschool in close to three years, some of us haven’t ever been inside! It has been in need of a refresh for some time, and we’re looking to you to help make that happen! Over the course of the next several months, we’ll be giving the preschool a much needed fresh look!

We’ve already begun the effort to scrape the popcorn ceilings, skim them, and add new lighting (see all the work in progress on page 7)! We especially love having our handy folks around to help out, but any of us can participate in this project! The project is ongoing, with shifts available on weekends and over holiday vacations.

We’re looking for volunteers! To sign up please contact PastorSarah@iucc.org or stop by and we’ll put you to work!

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**Advocates for Peace & Justice held a Post-Election Forum on November 13**

12/7 Lewis Blackburn 12/20 Calla McCarty
12/23 Lisa Bohan 12/26 Alex McClement
12/27 Bill Bonney 12/30 Shanthi Nataraj
12/11 Bill Dietrich 12/28 Craig Repp
12/3 Taelor Exelby 12/11 Mary Repp
12/23 Andrew Figueroa 12/1 Danny Sanders
12/31 Paul Figueroa 12/17 Nick Sanders
12/11 Tommie Kozlov 12/29 Pat Sauter
12/21 Elliott Macdonald 12/26 Pat Sutcliff
12/21 Findlay Macdonald 12/17 Todd Thompson
12/24 Aspen McCarty
Mission & Service Will Adopt 3 to 4 Families for Holiday Gifts During November Until the First Week of December

Hope you can help !!!

FAMILIES FORWARD
Holiday Giving Program

The Adopt-a-Family and Holiday Gift Program gives individuals, companies and community organizations the opportunity to give a happy holiday to children in need.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY
Donations are accepted from the beginning of November through early December, so that children’s “wish lists” can be filled.

HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE
Partner with us to give at-risk kids and teens a holiday season to remember. Lists of gift items commonly given out or requested by children and teens is provided.

GIFT DROP-OFF DEADLINE
MONDAY, DECEMBER 5

SIGN UP TO ADOPT A FAMILY OR SCHEDULE YOUR HOLIDAY DONATION DRIVE BY VISITING:
families-forward.org/holiday-giving

Thank you for bringing holiday cheer to local families!

FAMILIES FORWARD
UNTIL EVERY FAMILY HAS A HOME

Families Forward is an Irvine-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to prevent and end family homelessness by providing access to housing and resources that create lasting stability.
Concern America’s Marketplace of Fair Trade Crafts will be at:

**Irvine United Congregational Church**

**Sunday, December 4, 2022**

~After the 9:30am & 11am services~

Concern America’s fair trade craft program provides direct support to materially impoverished artisans and their communities in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. You get the opportunity to support them by purchasing their gorgeous hand made items.

For more information visit: [www.ConcernAmerica.org](http://www.ConcernAmerica.org)
Ministry with Young People

Info and photos provided by Lauren Louie, Myrna Bohan, and Martha Mecartney

Ms. Sandy leads our nature walk for us to express gratitude for nature! Special thanks to our youth volunteers for teaming up on the presentation & chaperoning us!

For All Saints Day we “lit” candles to honor special someones

The kids were inspired by UCC’s Climate Hope Cards Art Contest to create art & send messages to political leaders for climate justice!

Wendy Wiebach leads the kids in stretching their voices, bodies, and hearts at Children’s Choir! Note our hard-working youth volunteers building bricks for Sunday School in the background in right photo!

Jocelyn R sings with the kids with a big song of welcome for Advent
It was Christmas Eve. We were on a train going to visit one of our favorite Swedish families. Sweden was our home for over a year when I was there to complete work on my postgraduate degree. George, our daughters, and I agreed that one of our favorite homes to visit was that of Mea who had lived with us in California as an exchange student.

Mea and her parents lived just south of Stockholm, about an hour’s train ride from our apartment in Uppsala. When we arrived at the depot that afternoon, Mea’s parents, Erik and Marta, met us with horse and sleigh (actually, car). While Mea was fluent in English, her parents spoke very little, so a lot of head nodding and smiles accompanied our kindergarten-Swedish. Their hugs and “God Yul” (Merry Christmas) made us feel welcome.

As soon as we arrived at their home, Marta offered coffee, tea, cookies and sweet breads, a little snack to hold us over until dinner. Plus, it was important to make a toast with the sherry that awaited us in delicate Swedish crystal. The Swedish word for toasting is skål. Toasting requires a prescribed technique:

*Hold the bottom of the goblet at the approximate height of the third button from the top of your shirt. (No buttons? Guess.) Look into the eyes of each person present (this is important), then say “skål” and sip a bit of the luscious liquid. Remember to leave one sip in the bottom of the goblet as the last sip is used to toast the host and hostess. (How embarrassing to be so eager a drinker that none is left for that last important toast!)*

I don’t know about the others, but the cat and I took a nap following the sherry sips. I awoke to the pleasing sound of a Swedish voice proclaiming, “Jul Fest” (Christmas Party). We gathered in the living room around the beautifully decorated coffee table: a whiter than white tablecloth, red taper candles, holly leaves and berries, and Christmas chinaware. First another toast, this time with snaps (schnapps) and a beer chaser. Accompanying the drinks was the first course consisting of a variety of sill (herring): one in tomato sauce, another with onions, a third marinated in wine, and others in I don’t know what. Boiled potatoes, sliced cucumbers and tomatoes, and a variety of breads completed the offerings of this course. Needless to say, my hunger was sufficiently satisfied.

However, we weren’t done. Next, we moved to the dining room table for course number two. On the red tablecloth a variety of sliced meats, paté, cheese, pickled beets and breads greeted us along with a glass of wine. After thoroughly finishing that delicious food, the third course awaited us in the kitchen. We marched with large plates in hand to a huge baked ham coated with a mixture of egg, mustard, and breadcrumbs. Next to the ham was a basket of homemade brown bread that we dipped into a large kettle filled with warm ham broth. Red cabbage, peas, applesauce, stewed prunes, and strong mustard accompanied the ham of this course.

Brave souls with willing stomachs slipped in a fourth course: lutefisk (boiled dried fish) covered with a creamy, buttery white sauce and served with boiled potatoes garnished with dill. Mea’s parents and I were the only takers. (Yes, I like it. Perhaps you will understand some folks’ resistance to lutefisk when I tell you that it was being prepared at one of our churches in Southern California when the custodian came running into the kitchen shouting, “Which toilet backed up?” I kid you not. Not everyone appreciates the aroma emitting from lutefisk.)

We moved to the living room to complete dinner with strong, strong, strong coffee - I used a rich, thick cream to neutralize it. Eating was not over however. After opening our gifts we nibbled on candy, fruit, and seven kinds of cookies. Oh yes, we toasted twice more: once with brandy and once with Erik’s homemade wine, the last bottle of an excellent batch made several years earlier.

What a day! A day filled with warm Swedish hospitality that included the beauty of a stately pine tree with lit candles shining among its branches (buckets of water stood nearby), Christmas carols sung in both Swedish and English, and frequent expressions of “tack så mycket” (thank you so much). Oh yes, and a little bit of food and drink.
Handling Stress During the Holidays: A Spiritual Perspective
by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, Adult Education Ministry and Diversity & Inclusion Ministry

Many people in modern American society experience physical and psychological symptoms as a function of stress caused by the holidays. According to the American Psychological Association, people in the United States are more likely to feel that their stress increases rather than decreases during the holidays.

As Progressive Open and Affirming Christians, how should we handle the demands and consequences of stress?

Two acronyms come to mind in dealing with stress as a function of the holidays: P.A.U.S.E. (Postpone Action Until Serenity Emerges) and L.O.V.E. (Let Others Voluntarily Evolve). Both of these acronyms in my experience remind me of the words “Be Still and know that I am God...” (Psalm 46:10). These words lead me to have an interlude (Selah/悩) so I can just breathe slowly and oxygenate my brain as I decompress. As I do this, I have the opportunity to objectively examine the causes of my stress and thus mediate the symptoms.

Stress in general and during the holidays in particular can derail one’s relationship with God. Some ways I find useful in dealing with stress include being involved in corporate worship with others. Stress is rooted in uncertainty which can lead us to blame God. The Book of Psalms offers a plethora of verses that can help us to focus and stay calm during stressful times. I find these words useful as I inhale and exhale during times of stress “… [God’s] steadfast love endures forever, ...” (Psalm 100:5, NRSV).

I personally do not believe that God intervenes in my personal affairs or in times of stress, but I do find that prayer helps me to slow down. I adhere to the wisdom of the words that “the function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays” (Søren Kierkegaard). Another way that I find helpful in dealing with stress in general and stress as a function of the holidays is to ask for help or talk with a godly trusted friend who can hear me. Sometimes in expressing our stress we end up finding a way to reduce it or to find a healthy coping mechanism. Seeking the listening skills of a Stephen Minister is one way I have found relief from stressful situations. Sometimes it just takes someone to hear us and create a Sacred Space to express feelings. Naturally, acute stress may also require the assistance of a licensed clinical behaviorist.

Seek Community: It’s easy to give up community when we’re stressed about anything from a to-do list to family trauma or a work nightmare. The body of Christ is meant to strengthen us when we’re weak, help us in times of need, support us during difficulties, and celebrate God’s faithfulness with us. Resist the urge to walk away from the body of Christ when you feel overwhelmed. Even a simple prayer request over text message keeps you plugged in to people who care about you. (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 12:25-27)

Read Scripture: God’s Word repeatedly reminds us why worry and anxiety do not come from God. Meditate on the truth of Scripture and invite the Holy Spirit to work in your heart. (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 119:105; Matt. 4:4; Joshua 1:8)

Examine your load: Galatians 6 exhorts believers to share burdens as part of loving our neighbors and encouraging Christ-likeness. The Apostle Paul also, however, reinforces responsibility for ourselves. You are responsible for what’s on your plate. Too much prolonged stress may mean it is time to draw some boundaries, start saying “no,” and lighten your own load.

These biblical practices help recalibrate our spiritual response to stressors that disrupt equilibrium in our lives. Remembering that we serve a mighty, all-powerful God who reigns over every inch of our lives and promises to work all things for the good of those who love him helps rightly align our perspective.
When I was young, my mother used to say, “Be careful of that facial expression – your face might freeze like that!” George Orwell once said, “At fifty, everyone has the face he deserves.” Both have an element of truth to them, of course. As we grow older, our faces tell the stories of our lives – our sorrows and our joys are apparent in the downward lines around our mouths or the crinkles that bunch up around our eyes when we smile. People have to peer pretty closely at us to see the vestiges of the pretty girl or the handsome guy we used to be.

There is one big perk about growing old, however. It dawned on me the other day that because of my many years on the planet, I’ve had quite a wide range of experiences, both good and bad. When I’ve been able to stretch myself and see the verisimilitude, I’ve been able to use those past experiences to put myself in someone else’s shoes – to have an inkling of what they’re going through and have empathy for them.

I had a miserable time in grade school. I was a shy, nerdy, awkward kid – always the last one to be picked for any team. When my mother asked my fifth grade teacher how I was doing in school, he responded, “Well, academically she’s doing fine ...” You can fill in the blank for what he left unsaid. But you know what? That experience taught me what it felt like – really felt like on a visceral level - to not belong, to be on the outside looking in. As I grew up and developed a few social skills, I always kept a special place in my heart for those lost, disaffected, awkward souls who struggled to fit in. It gave me a lifelong empathy for the marginalized members of society.

I was the only child of a neurotic mother riddled with a wide range of crippling anxieties, so I know what it’s like to grow up with a mentally unstable parent. I’ve been married for 45 years to a combat veteran, so I have some idea of the damage PTSD can do to a person’s psyche. I’ve experienced failure, so my heart goes out to those who’ve had similar heartbreak. I’ve been a young mother who worked long hours but still couldn’t quite make ends meet, so I know how it feels to struggle economically. I’ve lost a beloved family member to suicide, so I know the uniquely painful combination of grief and guilt that comes with it. I’ve raised a feisty, headstrong child who tested my patience every single day, so I have enormous empathy for parents dealing with difficult offspring. I nursed that same child through a myriad of medical problems when she reached adulthood, so I’ve had a taste of what it’s like to tend to a seriously ill family member. I’ve even uprooted my entire family from a church we’d attended for many years because the pastor turned out to be a homophobe, so I understand why someone would leave a church over an issue that mattered to them. I could go on, but you get the general idea.

Don’t get me wrong - I’m one of the lucky ones. I know that. Many people have suffered through much worse than I have. I’m thankful that my troubles were manageable and that I was able to learn from them. Mostly, I’m grateful that God gave me enough setbacks in life to teach me some insight, empathy, and understanding.

Here’s my point: We can look back on our life’s trials and tribulations and be bitter, or we can look back on them and gain some perspective into the lives of other people going through similar situations. We’ve been there, so we can remember what it felt like back then and use it to open our eyes and hearts to see how those events apply to people who are suffering in the here and now. We can criticize a little less and empathize a little more: that’s the great perk of getting old if we care to exercise it.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus this holiday season, let’s try to dig into our wealth of experiences – both good and bad - to find some empathy for others going through similar struggles. Our faces may be getting old and wrinkled, but we can still stay young at heart and show some generosity of spirit. Merry Christmas!