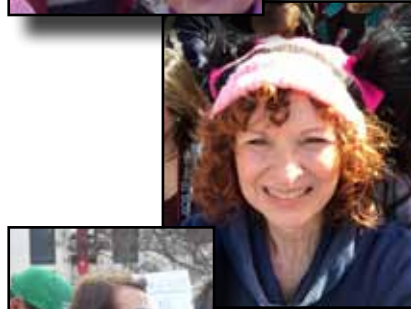


February 2017
 www.iucc.org
 Editor: Tricia Aynes

Some familiar IUCC faces were spotted in the crowd at the Women’s March OC on January 21 in Santa Ana!



IUCC members were part of a huge crowd that walked in solidarity with people across the U.S. in support of women’s rights, immigrant rights, LGBT rights, peace, justice, unity, freedom of speech, reproductive health, and climate protection. The Santa Ana march was one of an estimated 600 marches held worldwide.

Photos courtesy of Renae Boyum, Laura Long, Dean McCleskey, Myron Eng, Tricia Aynes, Jean Stewart, Cindy O’Dell, and Janet Johnson.



From the Pastor's Desk

the Rev. Dr. Paul Tellström

On the last Sunday of January, coinciding with our Winter Meeting, I dash to the airport and fly to wherever it is that our West Coast UCC Senior Pastors are gathering for a retreat. We try to keep the number at around 12, and we usually hire a church consultant.

We represent the increasingly smaller number of multi-staff churches in our denomination with attendance over 200. Our pastors can come from the state of Washington down to San Diego, California.

An unavoidable topic this year was the unsettling direction our country has taken, particularly with regard to the executive order banning nationals of seven Muslim-majority nations. We are trying not to be partisan, yet still preach the Gospel and address vital moral concerns that cannot be ignored. Several pastors, in our wine country regions in particular, face very divided churches and want to keep a sense of unity in their congregations.

One of my colleagues from Seattle wanted to step back last year. She turned 65 and she felt it was time to “go a little more part-time.” Now she says, “How can I? It feels like a hundred ping-pong balls are being thrown at us, and which one do we stop and throw ourselves on believing it to be live and explosive?”

Another woman colleague I respect and admire told us, “My congregation depends on me to be non-partisan. What is happening in America transcends Republican or Democrat. So, for the majority of my membership and the community around us, we held a vigil at the church the night after the election. People came and cried, prayed and sang, and I was just there among them. But on that Sunday, I told my congregation, “Today, I am everyone’s pastor.”

We discovered that each of us is struggling to be “everyone’s pastor.” At the same time, though, we all recognize that there is something that is very, very wrong with the ship of state. I was grateful to hear from two or three people in the greeting line last Sunday that mine is a giant “balancing act.”

What terrific leadership we have here at IUCC, and what a great staff I get to work with! Our Winter meeting reminds me of who we are. I was able to bring this point across to my clergy group this week. We are being asked to step up and be the church God is calling us to be in a time of crisis. It is as if everything has been building towards this moment and the challenges we will be facing as the strengthened body of Christ. More than ever before, it is time to be a Progressive Christian witness in Irvine and beyond.

See you in church,

Pastor Paul



IUCC Music Ministry

Another year, another budget... the music ministry is grateful to the congregation for voting to support our ministry for another year.

Though the choir itself is comprised of 55-60 volunteers who share their time and talents so generously, your pledges support our ministry in a very tangible way. One small example is music purchases.

Did you know that the average cost of a single piece of music for one choir member has increased from \$2 per copy up to \$3.50 per copy over the past five years? As you can see when you multiply this by 55-60 copies (one for each choir member, one for the director & accompanist) it adds up quickly. Luckily we have many anthems in our library from which to choose but, because our choir has doubled in size since John St. Marie came on board, we still have associated music costs to use older anthems. When we pull an older anthem from our library (for example, the beautiful anthem we shared on Sunday “Love is Living You”), we do not own enough legal copies for every choir member to perform, so we must purchase the number of copies we are missing in order to remain in compliance with copyright laws.

We are SO grateful that Connie Jones has so capably stepped in at the piano since Chris Luthi vacated the accompanist position in early December. Please keep us in your prayers as we embark on the difficult journey to find the right person to support the music ministry and lead the congregation in worship from the piano. We have been so blessed to have amazing artists and we hope to continue that tradition! A great accompanist makes such a difference to the rehearsal process and to the Sunday worship experience. Thank you again for your continued support of the Music Ministry at IUCC.

~ Jani Baker

Adult Education

by the Rev. Steve Swope



It's back – our third Faith & Works Conference will be here at IUCC on February 17-18! Dr. Jennifer McBride from McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, will speak at 7:00 p.m. on Friday and 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, on the topic “Becoming Radical Disciples.”

Dr. McBride has worked extensively with inmates of a women's prison and those on death row. She is a Bonhoeffer scholar and theologian and the author of *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness and Radical Discipleship: A Liturgical Politics of the Gospel*. Both books will be available for purchase and signing, courtesy of Irvine Valley College Bookstore.

A reception will follow the Friday evening lecture, and a light breakfast will be available before the Saturday morning lecture, at 9:00. You can register now - \$40 for adults, \$20 for students – at www.iucc.org/register.



Adult Sunday School is exploring the biblical Song of Songs (Song of Solomon), using a *Living The Questions* DVD. In March, Rev. Jerry Stinson will lead four weeks of discussion on “Alternatives to Christian Theism.” His classes will challenge and raise important questions for progressive Christians.



Tuesday Bible Study is approaching the conclusion of John's Gospel. The next topic, as we investigate the books of the New Testament in the order of their writing (according to Marcus Borg), will be *Ephesians*.

This month's Midweek Salon guest is Sarah Fiske-Phillips. She will share stories and pictures from her trip to India on Wednesday, Feb. 8, at 7:00 p.m. March's Midweek Salon will feature Dr. Marie Trout and her new book on blues music.



Please let me know if you plan to attend the program on “Tolerance & Violence in the Mind of God” at Cal State, Dominguez Hills, at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 7. We'd like to do some car-pooling. This is the first in a series of presentations on violence and religion, developed by Dr. Keith Boyum.



“A Day of Soul Time for Women” will be held in Plumer Hall on Saturday, Feb. 25 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Facilitator Chantel Zimmerman was last year's Women's Retreat leader. See page 9 for additional details. Register online before Feb. 17 at <https://iucc.churchcenteronline.com/registrations/events/52321>



Building Project Update

Since this congregation decided to move forward with preconstruction planning for Phase 1a in September 2016, the Building Task Force (BTF) has been hard at work doing just that. We continue to work collaboratively with our talented architects, domusstudio architecture. Currently, we are focused on a mid-February submission of our permit application to the City of Irvine.

In Phase 1a, we will add a single-story structure to our current Sanctuary, bringing much-needed new space to our aging campus. We'll offer an exuberant welcome to the community with a beautiful frontage along Alton, featuring our voice and mission through Micah 6:8 represented in multiple world languages: *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* The represented languages are being chosen based on: (1) most commonly spoken in Irvine/Orange County/California/the U.S. and throughout the world; (2) associated with world religions; and (3) spoken at UCC Global Mission sites. Also part of the new frontage, a widened driveway entrance, accessible walkway and new low-water-use landscaping will be inviting to visitors and neighbors alike.

Along with administrative space and staff offices, we'll add three configurable meeting rooms, each with a capacity of 25 people. Moveable sound-proof partitions will allow us to combine two meeting rooms for larger groups or all three meeting rooms into one large space for approximately 80 people. The new coffee corner, outdoor seating and back patio will offer gathering places for conversation and fellowship. Once the new building is completed, the current church office will be remodeled into a new classroom. These new indoor and outdoor spaces will reflect our commitment to green faith as well as seamlessly integrate with our current building, with complementary colors and finishes. A "Samples Board" is currently on display in the Narthex – please stop by and see it.

To help ensure that the project stays on budget, the BTF is bringing a general contractor onto our preconstruction planning team. We have completed interviews and are recommending one firm to the Administration Board. By partnering with a contractor early in the project, we can avoid bid "sticker shock" as well as develop a strong collaborative relationship.

Once we have permits and bids in hand, we will present this project for congregational review and approval at the Spring Meeting in mid-May. For more information, please contact any BTF member or email btfchair@iucc.org. ~ Anne Rosse

Capital Campaign Update

Thank you, IUCC, for your generous giving to our "Embracing the Future" capital campaign. To date, we've received more than \$640,000 (including in-kind gifts) toward the almost \$1.3 million you pledged. Let's keep this up! Every pledge payment brings us closer to being able to break ground on this exciting project.

At the Spring Meeting (in mid-May), with bids and permits in hand, we anticipate presenting this construction project for congregational review, asking your approval to move forward with ground breaking. Between now and our Spring Meeting, here's what you can do:

- Continue to make pledge payments as generously as you can. The more construction funds we have on hand, the better options we will have in terms of when we break ground and how much money we have to borrow.
- If you haven't joined your church family in supporting this project, we invite you to do so. We welcome new pledges at any time. We are still actively fundraising and would love to have your support!
- If you've completed your pledge and find yourself able to give us just a little more, we would be grateful.

Campaign pledges are payable over three years (through July 31, 2019). For those who can, we would deeply appreciate pledge completion as quickly as possible. Being able to collect most campaign pledges by the time construction of the new building is done (projected to be in Summer 2018) will help IUCC stay financially strong.

When submitting a paper or electronic check, please note "building" on the memo line. When submitting a check that includes both your annual offering ("stewardship") and campaign pledge ("building"), please also indicate the split on the memo line. These actions will make sure we are applying your gift correctly. For pledge payments that involve the transfer of stocks or securities, or if you are doing an IRA distribution, please contact the Church Office.

For assistance with your pledge or to learn more about this exciting project, please contact capitalcampaign@iucc.org.

Because of your generous investment in our future, IUCC is another step closer to a campus that supports our commitment to nurture tomorrow's leaders and follow Christ's teachings to love and care for our neighbors, be good stewards of our environment and live in peace. Thank you!
~ Anne Rosse

Moderator's Column

by Renae Boyum



“Community is the ability to pass time with people just to build trust, just to be sure of each other. A Community is not just something you have. It is something you *do* and you have to do it all the time.” (quote from a Facebook posting)

IUCC is a *community* of faith.

When we gather together as this community we are building trust, building the ability to be sure of each other. We are “doing” community. We observe that community is not automatic: we must *do* it. As I think back over the past weeks, I am reminded of the many ways we at IUCC have been doing community.

On January 21, numerous friends and members of IUCC joined with the throng supporting the Women’s March in Santa Ana. It was a beautiful, sunny day full of energy, concern, caring, and commitment to causes greater than ourselves. As Keith and I marched, I was reminded and encouraged that there is strength in *community*.

On January 29, the worship service and Pastor Paul’s message continued this sense of concern, caring, and commitment. As Pastor Paul gave his sermon on the Beatitudes, he challenged us to strive for righteousness and to be the church that God is calling us to be. He reminded us of our embrace of the words from Micah 6:8 - “What does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God” and what those words mean for a spirit-filled and action-oriented faith *community*.

Immediately after 2nd service on the 29th, we gathered for IUCC’s Winter Congregational meeting. As a *community*, we changed a pair of bylaws, and adopted the 2017 budget.

We heard reports from the GREENfaith Committee, the Long Range Planning Task Force, and the Building Task Force. As we heard those reports, I could sense that IUCC is truly a place where God is still speaking. As we participated in the “business” of church, I could sense the commitment the members of IUCC have to making sure our community of faith continues to prosper and be a beacon of Progressive Christianity here in Irvine and the communities beyond.

Later that same day, Keith and I gathered with our Comma Group, *7 Transplants and a Native*. This is our seventh Comma Group experience and we are enjoying the conversations (both related to the topic at hand and others), the food, the fellowship, but most of all the care and support that this small group so willingly gives. We are “doing” *community* and in accordance with my opening quote, we are building trust and becoming sure of each other. It is an enriching, fulfilling, and meaningful experience and truly one of the best things that IUCC offers.

Being part of community also means giving of your time and talents. **On February 19, we will have a Ministries Fair on the patio.** The various ministries and committees of our church will have information available about how you can make a difference and be a part of “doing” *community* building. I hope you will be join us on that day.

There are yet more examples that illustrate how we “do” community here at IUCC. Whatever those events, experiences, programs, or meetings are, my hope is that you are mindful that building a community is not automatic. It takes thoughtfulness, concern and caring for each other, and commitment to *do community* in a way that will truly make a difference.

In faith and community,

Renae



FEBRUARY

2/06	Jim Aynes	2/25	Brian McComb
2/22	Iris Bjorklund	2/23	Kris Miaco
2/21	Cooper Campbell	2/02	Donna Picard
2/28	John Emerson	2/04	Elizabeth Rodriguez
2/03	Annika Evensen	2/03	Matthew Ruiz
2/25	Vernon Field	2/08	Rachel Selke
2/10	Greg Guth	2/15	Karen Smith
2/21	Jim Hamilton	2/15	Peggy Stalter
2/13	Kaytee Macdonald	2/21	Lynn Terry

Statement on the Boy Scouts' transgender youth membership policy

by Matt Mirmak



For 107 years, the Boy Scouts of America have delivered a fun and safe program that emphasizes leadership, responsible environmental stewardship, outdoor and life skills, and active civic involvement to millions of youth across the nation. On January 30, the Boy Scouts of America made an important decision to make their program

accessible to more youth and families by clarifying their policy regarding transgender youth. Effective immediately, transgender youth that identify as male are welcome in the male-only programs of the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts. Prior to this policy announcement, transgender youth were only permitted to be in the co-ed programs of the Boy Scouts which include Exploring, Venturing, and Sea Scouts. Since the Boy Scouts will be celebrating their 107th birthday on February 8, the timing of this announcement is a welcome breath of hope and optimism for the future.

Since our founding three years ago, Troop 602 has always been committed to being an extension of the values of its sponsor, Irvine United Congregational Church. We have never turned away a youth or an adult leader because of their race, religion (or lack thereof), disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. As far as adult leaders go, we only require that they pass a criminal background check conducted by the Orange County Council to ensure the safety of our youth members. As far as our youth go, we only ask that they abide by the principles of the Scout Oath and Law in their interaction with other Scouts, Scout leaders, and the public at large.

Troop 602 will continue to offer the youth and families of our community a safe, fun, and educational outdoors based program that emphasizes outdoor skills, challenging and fun outdoor activities, leadership and life skills, active civic involvement, and responsible environmental stewardship.

I can guarantee you that the members of Troop 602 will “be prepared” to support and provide leadership in ushering in this new policy that makes the Scouting program accessible to more youth and families. I hope that the members of Irvine United Congregational Church will continue to support the mission of Troop 602 as we continue to grow

our troop and make a difference in the lives of our youth and our nation as a whole. If you have any questions about the new membership policy or how you and your family can support Troop 602 in their efforts to make Scouting a safe and inclusive environment for our youth, please feel free to reach out to me at a Sunday service or via email at irvineeaglescout1987@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support of our troop and the Boy Scouts of America. America needs Scouting, now more than ever.

Yours in Scouting,

Matt Mirmak
Eagle Scout (1986)
Chartered Organization Representative, Troop 602





Green Faith Team

Committed to Environmental Justice



Reducing plastics pollution – consumer voting by consumer choices

by Cheryl Trobiani

Plastics pollution in our oceans is one of the most disturbing environmental issues that we've read about in our current Comma Group series. The images of parent seabirds selecting plastic bits from the ocean to feed to their young – and the young dying of starvation on Midway Island – is a heart-wrenching call to action to reduce our dependency on single use plastic items.

Looking around my own home, I am shocked at the number of everyday plastic items that I use and dispose of daily. As with all problems that seem insurmountable at first, we have to start somewhere. And so I've gone looking for people and organizations who are talking about reducing our dependence on household and packaging plastics. I found many, and will share those resources in another article.

Tree Hugger is one very comprehensive website dedicated “to being a one-stop shop for green news, eco-friendly solutions, and product information.” Their goal is to “drive sustainability into the mainstream” consciousness. Their information is well presented and very positive.

Like many other websites concerned with plastics recycling, **Tree Hugger** has a list of ways to reduce individual use of plastics. I thought that we might think of these ideas as a form of “**voting**” with our consumer choices. What we buy – and what we stay away from buying – can influence the marketplace to turn to more eco-friendly paper, cardboard, glass, and other alternatives. When we use paper and cardboard, we kill trees – and this is a problem too. But the replanting of trees can be mandated – and trees both take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen into our atmosphere (for a double environmental benefit).

The list below is partly extracted – and personalized -- from TreeHugger.com

1. **Bring your own shopping bag or use your own hands** – while we've taken a step forward in California by voting to ban disposable shopping bags, grocery stores are now selling even *more* durable plastic bags. When I forget my reusable bag – as I often still do – I buy only what I can carry to my car in my own hands, pockets, or shopping cart. It's easy to load things into the back seat and

just carry them up to the house. I think about our beautiful oceans when I do this!

2. **Stop buying bottled water.** Use a metal water bottle or a plastic reusable bottle. At home and work, I make my own great tasting water with a water filter, and I drink it from a ceramic mug or a glass.
3. **Bring a reusable cup or thermos to your local coffee shop.** I think we should encourage the use of reusable cups with lids like the one that Starbucks sells for less than \$2. Even though it's made of plastic, it's meant to be used again and again.
4. **Choose items packaged in cardboard and paper over plastic.** Try to buy pasta and detergent packaged in boxes instead of in plastic. It's getting harder to do these days, but could we retrain the manufacturers of detergents, pasta, flour, and sugar to move back to cardboard from plastic?
5. **Stop buying plastic straws and stop using plastic straws** in restaurants. It's a completely unnecessary item. Lobby to bring back the paper straw; it works just as well and is biodegradable.
6. **Don't buy face washes with plastic microbeads.** Refuse to buy face washes and toothpaste that contain microbeads. It's impossible for wastewater treatment facilities to filter them out, and they simply enter downstream water directly. We can buy washes with natural scrubbers such as walnut shells and coconut shells.
7. **Don't buy disposable razors.** And look for blades with the least plastic in the design.
8. **Use cloth diapers** instead of disposable diapers. It's more work, but healthier for your baby.

Did you know that there are now eco-friendly items for your period? It seems there are reusable options like [the Diva Cup](#), the [Ruby Cup](#) and [DIY-with-pride reusable cloth](#)

GREENfaith article continued on page 8

[pads](#). But if you're not quite ready to try these new products, start by not buying tampon brands with plastic applicators. What was wrong with cardboard?

9. Re-think your food storage. I have stopped buying "baggies" completely. Instead, I use waxed paper and glass or plastic storage containers for all food storage and carrying lunch. It takes a little more thought and work, but I think of the birds and dolphins who won't think my sandwich baggie is a jellyfish. I save the tops of Starbucks take-out cups and use them as covers on items I'm storing in the refrigerator. I look at every piece of plastic that comes into my house and try to find ways to reuse it.

10. Lobby local restaurants to change to cardboard containers for carry out food. It may be time to resist the use of plastic take-out containers – we get way too many of them, and they're not recyclable once they're considered dirty. We could lobby for cardboard containers or to be allowed to bring our own glass or plastic reusable containers to take our own leftovers home.

The evolution of healthier food choices coming onto the market in the last decade has shown that consumers do have the power to change the direction of the market. I believe it's time to take the same kind of initiative with plastic packaging and disposable plastics. It's time to use our consumer power to redirect the market to reduce especially the volumes of single-use plastics that end up in our oceans and landfills.

So look around your home, think about your daily activities in the kitchen, laundry, bathroom and grocery store. And consider your own ideas for reducing plastic waste. Let's bring all ideas forward for discussion here.

And remember to at least recycle all plastics that you can't do without.

~ Cheryl Trobiani for the GREENfaith team (Vivian Johnson, Judy Curry, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Tony Dover, Carol Getz, and Eileen Vincent)




Go Green Sunday

On Feb. 26, the Congregation is encouraged to walk, bike, and ride-share to church.

Last month, several of us gathered to watch *Before the Flood*. We saw that the science is clear, but our future is not. As a follow-up to the movie, this February we are putting on Go Green Sunday where we hope to challenge the congregation to take the next step to reduce our "carbon footprint." We are working on how we get to church. Please don't stay away if you can't participate in this challenge. There are many other ways that you can Green Up, and we will cover that another day. If you have a hybrid or an electric car, there will be a specially designated spot in the parking lot for you! ~ Judy Curry



Miss Lily's Green Tips

Dear Readers,

My niece is very excited about Valentine's Day this year. (Or, singles awareness day, as my nephew calls it.). She lives in Irvine and plans to put red ribbons on all of the trees in the neighborhood. She has become a treehugger. She goes on walks and hugs every tree she meets. She is amazed at their beauty.



So, on Valentine's Day, dear Readers, please hug a tree. Kisses are fine, too.

Love,
Miss Lily

News & Events



Midweek Salon February 8 at 7 p.m.

This month's Midweek Salon guest is Pastor Sarah Fiske-Phillips. She will share stories and pictures from her trip to India. March's Midweek Salon will feature Dr. Marie Trout and her new book on blues music.



Faith & Works: A conference for the 21st Century February 17 & 18

Dr. Jennifer McBride from McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, will speak at 7:00 p.m. on Friday and 10:00 a.m. on Saturday on the topic "Becoming Radical Disciples." You can register now - \$40 for adults, \$20 for students - at www.iucc.org/register. See page 3 for more details!



Ministry Fair Sunday, February 19 After BOTH services, on the patio

Learn more about the many opportunities to become involved and make a difference in the life and activities of IUCC! The fair is for everyone. Ministry and committee chairs will be there to answer questions, give you information, and sign you up for one (or more) of the ministries and committees that are a vital part of IUCC. Here's a list of ministries/committees that will be part of the Ministry Fair:

- * Adult Programs * Advocates for Peace and Justice *
- * Communication * Congregational Care * Deacons *
- * Fellowship * Hospitality * Mission and Service *
- * Music * New Member Development *
- * Stephen Ministry * Worship * Young People *
- * Child Care Committee *
- * Building and Grounds Committee *
- * Fund Development Committee *
- * Technology Committee *



Women's "Day of Soul Time" on February 25

Register by February 17!

All IUCC women and friends are invited to a day of "soul time" to tend to inner spiritual needs, to reflect, and to connect with their deeper intuitive selves from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 25, in Plumer Hall.

Chanel Zimmerman, creative director of Art & Soul Lab, will lead this FREE workshop using SoulCollage—a gentle, playful way to explore one's inner self—to create the opportunity to explore, contemplate, and interact with our quiet interiors, offering the spaciousness needed for personal "ah-ha" moments. The day will be filled with opportunities to go inward and express outwardly through large and small group activities, punctuated with time for silence.

The event is FREE, but registration is necessary by Friday, February 17, to ensure sufficient materials for all. Participants should bring a brown-bag lunch with them to the event; beverages and snacks will be provided. Register online before Feb. 17: <https://iucc.churchcenteronline.com/registrations/events/52321>



"Tolerance & Violence in the Mind of God" CSU Dominguez Hills Library 5th Floor 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 7.

This series of lectures at CSU Dominguez Hills begins with an address by UC Santa Barbara professor Mark Juergensmeyer speaking on *What's God Have to Do with It?* This is the first in a series of presentations on violence and religion, developed by Dr. Keith Boyum. We'd like to do some car-pooling. Contact Steve Swope if you'd like to learn more.

Question: Why Can't or Won't the Church Change? Answer: THEISM

PC at IUCC: A monthly peek at some Progressive Christian thinking by Bil Aulenbach, retired Episcopal priest

I don't think it's any secret, but many folks would agree that churches in the U.S., Europe and other developed countries are beginning to realize that "rigor mortis" has set in, but they don't seem to be able to do anything about revitalizing themselves. Do you agree? Why or why not? Some defenders of the faith (4th century types) simply see this as a phase that the church goes through periodically.

From my vantage point, I don't see how a church can survive if it insists that God lives up there, in heaven, and is the Great Master Puppeteer responsible for everything that happens. People pray to this God or his Son, to make certain that all kinds of things either happen or don't happen.

This concept of God is very old (4,000 years or more) and assumes that the world is flat in a four-tiered structure starting with water under us, then the stationary earth, up to the "firmament" consisting of the sun which revolves around the earth, as well as the moon and the stars. Then there are the waters above, which cause all the precipitation. Finally, we arrive at Heaven where divinity dwells. I have a diagram which I use for teaching purposes to give folks a visual.

Unfortunately, most of the church's theology, hymnology, prayers and teaching are built along this premise and, for so many folks, this idea just doesn't cut it. They know differently because civilization has made so much progress (especially in my 85 years). They don't want to be involved in such a church or send their children to a Sunday School which fosters such theology. Thus, they see the church as irrelevant and they aren't interested.

But hold on a minute! When I turned 70, I made a vow that I would not tell, spread, or perpetuate any more of the church's untruths. This isn't easy. I was raised with such mistruths, went to a church that reiterated the lies every Sunday and during the week. I went to a seminary, supposedly a very progressive one, but it encouraged its students to keep on marketing such deceptions. In the active ministry, again I had to go along with the party line if I wanted to be successful.

I sort of did, but quietly changed some things. I call God "Creation," which subtly took away gender, anthropomorphism, and quietly promoted God to be involved in the whole universe, not just that speck in the

sand, the little old earth. It also helped me in many other ways, the first being that I no longer had to describe or guess who or what it is: the furthest I'll go to using one of Paul Tillich's ideas, the ground of all being.

Back to earth, I then reconsidered Jesus and made him a fellow human being, Jewish, who was charismatic, a fabulous teacher/preacher, with a solid message of agape who revolutionized the world without ever firing a shot. I call him my Christ (everyone has one of those) because he has shared with me how to live life to the fullest. It's worked.

He taught me that prayer is a call to action, not for NoOne UpThere, but for me.

I am to pray for my 96-year sister that she keeps finding the strength to move forward but also that I need to call her, stop by, visit her and hold her hand.

It was amazing how most of the church's dogma and doctrine went out the window once I promoted God and demoted Jesus. I'll share that later but for now, I can assure you that once I did that, I grew as a human being and in my faith. It has never been stronger.

Do you believe me? I just finished writing another book in which I describe the process in more detail. It's called, "Cramming for the Finals" and is due out late April or early May.

I have a website, www.peacelovejoyhope.com as well as a blog site, "What Bil is Saying." I invite you to look at both.

peace love joy hope

Bil



Powerful Parenting

Dr. Lorraine Fox

FEEDBACK: LOOKING FORWARD, NOT BACK

We continue our discussion about providing “feedback” to someone we care about in order to give them a more accurate perception of their own behavior. For all of the reasons we’ve discussed, knowing yourself well is an important “key” to both happy relationships and a happy life. Knowing who, and how, you are, will make all exchanges with other people easier for both them and you. It will also make understanding your part in what happens in your life easier, thus allowing self-correction if you want different outcomes. For this reason feedback, although difficult and not always welcome, is a great gift. For parents, it is an especially loving gift because getting to know yourself well at an early age will insure that you will not require as much feedback from others later in life, as you will be able to provide your own feedback in the privacy of your mind. While still a little embarrassing sometimes, it is not as embarrassing as having to hear things you didn’t know about yourself from others.

Thus far in our consideration of “conditions” for providing feedback that will make it most effective, we have discussed five such conditions, talking about “what” people do and not “why” we think they do it. This month we’ll consider condition number six: **directing feedback toward behavior people can change.** I’m sure all of you reading this have been in the position of being told by someone that you shouldn’t have done something that you did. Hearing this always causes us emotional distress as there is no way to change something that has already been done. Hearing about something that we’ve done in the past, that cannot be undone, causes us to feel powerless. Feelings of powerlessness lead to behaviors that make it difficult to get along with other people. It also makes it difficult to live with ourselves. Neither of these is a goal of feedback. **Constructive feedback, then, is always about something someone is doing now, that can be changed if they decide to change it.** Past behavior can be brought up if (and only if) it is continuing into the present.

Think about the last time you had an unpleasant exchange with someone close to you – your intimate partner, one of your children, someone at work, or a close friend. Did you notice how when both of you started to feel powerless (unable to influence the behavior of the other), one or both of you started dragging up issues from the past as emotional “weapons” to hurt the other? I fear long time couples are probably the worst – having been known to

drag up old business from decades ago in the middle of a fight. Parents of older children are also often guilty, talking about behaviors from young childhood long over. From there, things tend to deteriorate badly. This slip into unpleasantness is not because we don’t care about each other, but because there is nothing to be done about the past, and thus nowhere to go to remedy the situation. Constructive feedback, then, requires discipline.

In order for feedback to be helpful, the person receiving it must feel like there is something to be done about the behavior we are unhappy with. The behavior must be something they are doing **now**, that they can examine when they understand how it affects others. Even if they have done similar behavior in the past, it is only because they continue to act that way that we believe we can help them with feedback. Feedback is a way to honor someone by giving them an opportunity to take a look at the way they impact others and feel able to make changes in order to improve relationships.

Cowardly comments about behavior are much more common than courageous ones. It is easier to “gossip” or to make comments to other people about what someone is doing that we don’t like. But I am deprived of the opportunity to change if you tell someone else what I’m doing that bothers you. If you honor me you will tell me. Granted, talking behind my back is easier than talking to my face, but it is never helpful to me.

Parents don’t like to be confronted with behavior done by their children that others don’t like, but they often end up in situations they don’t understand because of the lack of directness. One parent will tell another parent that they don’t like the way my child behaves. But they don’t tell me. So my child continues to act in a problematic way, causing the displeasure to continue. Tell me what my child does that is causing problems, even though I may not be gracious when receiving the news. I can then talk to my child directly, and help him or her to understand why others respond to them as they do. Again, even with children, we only talk to them about what they are doing now, so that they feel able to make changes. We may want to give them examples from the past, but it is important to focus on the present, which is the only thing we can do anything about.

Whenever we are inclined to muster up our courage and have the difficult conversation about why we are displeased about the behavior of another person, it is important to give them the courtesy of sticking to a behavior they are doing now, that they can consider modifying now. Feedback is not meant for us to get something off our chest that has been bothering us. Feedback is a gift of love to someone else that may end up benefiting us as well.