

January 2017
www.iucc.org
Editor: Tricia Aynes

Our Christmas Eve early service featured a memorable children's program!



Photos courtesy of Sarah Fiske-Phillips

Our Advent Workshop & Chili Cook-off on December 4 was fun for all ages!



Myron Eng won the highly coveted chili cook-off trophy



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Sarah Fiske-Phillips



From the Pastor's Desk

the Rev. Dr. Paul Tellström



I had mixed feelings about celebrating New Years Eve last week.

Carl and I spend every New Years at the cabin in Big Bear with our friends Karen and Armond. We've been doing this for twenty years. At midnight we go outside with noisemakers and the neighbors from the blocks all around us do likewise, clanging pots and pans

or whatever is handy. We all make tremendous amounts of noise and shout our wishes for a "Happy New Year" earnestly yet facelessly to each other in the dark, and then we go back inside and turn to whatever it was that we were doing before midnight called.

We love our neighbors to our left, even though she took up learning to play the bagpipes in mid-life while using the space between our cabins as a practice marching ground. It was from that vantage point that she noticed water escaping our back door when a leak occurred. She turned the water off and notified us. I like to think she did it all while playing, "Scotland the Brave" (the strongest piece in her repertoire).

We're not fond of our neighbors on our right. Conservative Baptists, the husband used to make small talk with us until he put, "Yes on Prop 8" signs on his lawn and we countered. The wife does not acknowledge our existence.

With a few notable exceptions, we won't really be speaking to the residents of this collection of cabins on small, postage-stamp size lots again throughout the year until this inevitable holiday obliges us to go out into the street again wearing tissue-paper crowns, blowing through razzing horns and shouting our wishes for a prosperous New Year to each other.

This year, Karen and Armond arrived the night before and we sat down to soup and salad, enjoying each other's company as we do. But Karen started to feel unwell. Within a couple of hours she had a fever of over 100, so instead of staying up talking until 2-3 in the morning as she and I do, we made it an early night. The next day we opened presents together after breakfast, whereupon they packed up and drove home.

We asked friends in Big Bear (UCC, no less) to join us for our dinner reservations. The snow fell heavier and heavier

during our delightful evening overlooking the lake, and we realized that we would have to abandon our Prius in the village. They offered to drive us home in their four-wheel drive. We were snowed in!

At three minutes to midnight, Carl and I got our ratty old noisemakers out of their drawer, put on our coats and headed out to the street. The moment arrived and the blowers razzed, followed by the sound of pots and pans clunking. People began to shout, "Happy New Year!"

This went on for a while, and I suspect it is because for this one elongated moment, we could all believe that ours are the voices of "real neighbors" calling out to each other through a communal experience of needing to believe we are "known."

That's why I worry a little about this New Year that's upon us now. It feels as if we've given up on being a nation that is big enough to hold us all together across religious, political, socio-economic, racial, gender and geographical lines. We don't know who we are anymore. We watch, hear or read the news according to our own ideology, and group ourselves to some degree into like-minded communities.

After the elections, I looked into some suggested reading from the New York Times. You may have seen this: <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/books/6-books-to-help-understand-trumps-win.html>

I picked up "The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New-America," by George Packer, and I am now into "Strangers in Their Own Land," by Arlie Russel Hochschild.

In "The Unwinding," Packer describes how the social contract has slowly frayed in the last 30-plus years, providing a series of vignettes of Washington insiders to rust-belt workers to hip-hop artists—a patchwork quilt with an accent on "patchwork," describing how disconnected we have become from any common vision of who we are as a country.

Hochschild's book is more recent (September 2016) and she helps to clarify some of the feelings I have had as a pastor over the last 20-plus years, as I have seen shifts occur in our denominations and congregations, while listening to colleagues who have had to walk a careful line as these shifts continue to occur.

From the Pastor's Desk continued on page 4

She writes, "In 1960, when a survey asked American adults whether it would 'disturb' them if their child married a member of the other political party, no more than 5 percent of either party answered 'yes.' But in 2010, 33 percent of Democrats and 40 percent of Republicans answered 'yes.' In fact, 'partyism,' as some call it, now beats race as the source of divisive prejudice. When Americans moved in the past, they left in search of better jobs, cheaper housing, or milder weather. But according to 'The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded Americans Is Tearing Us Apart' by Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, when people move today, it is more often to live near others who share their views. People are segregating themselves into different emotionally toned enclaves—anger here, hopefulness and trust there. And the more that people confine themselves to like-minded company, the more extreme their views become. According to a 2014 Pew study of over 10,000 Americans, the most politically engaged on each side see those in the 'other party' not just as wrong, but as 'so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being.' Compared to the past, each side also increasingly gets its news from its own television channel—the right from Fox News, the left from MSNBC. And so the divide widens."

And now into the mix comes a new president who is brash, unafraid to offend, and who brings no experience in politics or diplomacy. I don't know what is going to happen—except that many things are certainly going to happen. In the midst of it all, we are called to be the church.

In UCC President John Dorhauer's recent Pastoral Letter to our churches, he tells us, "Our core values of love, hospitality and justice for all must be fully embraced in the days to come. It could well be that we were called into being for just such a time as this."

We know who we are—and we know why we exist—we will continue to find the means to be the church God calls us to be. It might behoove us all to do three things:

- Talk, read and study about how and why the polarization that has grown in our country continues to do so. What role do we as Progressive Christians play in the distancing that is taking place?
- Engage. When Justin Lee visited with us in September, the thing he talked about that impressed me most was his willingness to go into the places where minds had been made up negatively about LGBT people, and simply be a flesh and blood representation of a young gay man, willing to be

open, honest and loving among people who came prepared to dislike him. It was a gift to him to be able to get to know them on this level as well.

- Act on our core values. We can always do better in building and strengthening relationships with people with whom we disagree. At the same time, we are a progressive church—know where you are when you take a seat, and help us to separate the justice issue from the jab.

On New Years Eve, we stood facelessly in the dark, earnestly shouting our best wishes for a New Year to our geographical neighbors we don't know. Likewise they made as much noise as they could, shouting back across the void for a little longer than I remember ten or twenty years ago, to preserve the conceit that there are real neighbors in the neighborhood.

What happens next is up to us. Is it the business of the church as followers of Jesus to be peacemakers and justice bringers?

John Dorhauer thinks so, and so do I. "Our core values of love, hospitality and justice for all must be fully embraced in the days to come. It could well be that we were called into being for just such a time as this."

Such a time as this is now, and here.

Pastor Paul



Adult Education

by the Rev. Steve Swope

Some exciting things are going to be happening in Adult Programs for 2017! I hope you'll be a part of many of these opportunities.



Our 3rd **Faith & Works Conference** will be Friday and Saturday, Feb. 17-18, and features Dr. Jennifer McBride, associate dean at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Dr. McBride has worked extensively with women in prison and on death-row and spent a year with the Open Door Community in Atlanta, an intentionally interracial and activist residential Christian community.

Dr. McBride's book *Reducing Distance: A Liturgical Politics of the Gospel* has just been published; she is also the author of *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness*. She will speak at 7:00 p.m. on Friday and 10:00 a.m. on Saturday. Register for the full event for \$40 (\$20 for students) at www.iucc.org/register. Don't wait; do it today!



Comma Groups – and all IUCC members and friends – will have the chance to view National Geographic's climate-change documentary *Before the Flood*, featuring Leonardo DiCaprio, on Sunday, Jan. 22 at 12:30 in Plumer Hall. Sponsored by the GREENfaith Team, light refreshments will be provided.



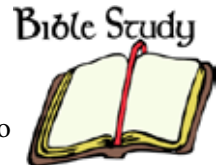
Adult Sunday School will return on Sunday, Jan. 8, with two special classes led by Rev. Terry LePage. If you've had some uncomfortable holiday conversations, if you want to be able to share your views honestly but in a way that bridges gaps and builds relationships, join Terry at 8:45 or 10:00 a.m. to learn how to talk passionately

but with compassion about issues that are important to us.

After that, we'll explore the Song of Songs (also known as Song of Solomon) from the Hebrew scriptures, with a Living the Questions DVD resources featuring Old Testament

scholar and UCC minister Dr. Lisa Michele Wolfe. Dr. Wolfe will help us examine what the Song of Songs suggests about the role and situation of women in the ancient Middle East, and how the female character in the Song sets an example of confidence and strength.

Tuesday afternoon Bible Study should finish discussing the Gospel of John this month. Ken Wyant always provides insight, not only into the text itself but also the setting of the Gospel writer and his community. Understanding why John told the story of Jesus the way he did, can help us decide how applies to our own times.



Upcoming **Midweek Salons** will feature Dr. A. J. Shaka of the UCI Nuclear Reactor Facility, Marie Trout talking about her new book on the blues, and Pastor Sarah Fiske-Phillips sharing stories from her trip to India. Watch for details!



Our friends at **University Synagogue** will host Dr. David Ruderman, Professor of Modern Jewish History at University of Pennsylvania, at 8:00 pm on Friday, Jan. 20. He will speak on "Jewish Messiahs: An Overview." This should provide some enlightening information on the thought-context around reactions to Jesus of Nazareth.

The synagogue's Jewish Film Festival features *The Law* at 9:30 a.m. on January 8, the story of French health minister Simone Veil's effort to legalize abortion, and at 7:00 p.m. on January 25, *Tango Glories*, the tale of a psychiatric patient who communicates only in lyrics from old tango songs. More information can be found at www.universitiesynagogue.org.

And there's a program in early February you won't want to miss. California State University, Dominguez Hills, is hosting Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer, professor of Global Studies, Sociology, and Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara, speaking on **Tolerance and Violence in the Mind of God**. This will take place on the campus at 2:30 on Tuesday, Feb. 7. A reception will follow, and we'd like to get a group together. Please let me know if you're interested.

Building Project Update

IUCC has been talking about improvements to our aging campus for several years now. Finally, in 2017, we can anticipate that campus transformation to begin. With the goal of breaking ground in Summer 2017, the Building Task Force (BTF) is hard at work with our skilled architects, domusstudio architecture, on plans for Phase 1a.

This first phase will add a 2600 sq. ft. single-story structure to our current Sanctuary. It will add essential new spaces, including: a new church office, staff offices, single-occupancy restroom, coffee corner and three configurable meeting rooms. Each meeting room will have a capacity of 25 people; moveable sound-proof partitions will permit us to combine two meeting rooms for larger groups or all three meeting rooms into one large space. Our patio fellowship area will have new canopy tree shaded seating and a new back patio will add even more outdoor space. A widened driveway entrance, accessible walkway, new landscaping and a welcoming (and more visible) sign along Alton Parkway are also included in this phase. Our busy preschool will be able to move into and use the existing church office once the new building is completed.

These new indoor and outdoor spaces will reflect IUCC's commitment to green faith as well as seamlessly integrate with our current building, with complementary colors and finishes. The BTF is on schedule to submit our permit application to the City of Irvine in mid-February so we'll be ready with permits and bids in hand for congregational review in May 2017.

To help ensure that the project stays on budget, the BTF is currently exploring the option of bringing a general contractor onboard. By partnering with a contractor early in the project, we can avoid bid "sticker shock" as well as develop a strong collaborative relationship.

BTF members represent the congregation and are your eyes/ears/voices for this project. These hardworking members are: Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Cindy O'Dell, Jim Raver, Anne Rosse (chair), Pat Sauter, Michael Spindle and Pastor Paul. ~ Anne Rosse

Capital Campaign Update

In 2016, IUCC took bold steps forward by enthusiastically undertaking a capital campaign and subsequently deciding to move forward with the building project. This year, we look forward to breaking ground on Phase 1a, which will bring much-needed new space to our aging church campus.

Thank you for your 2016 support of IUCC's "Embracing the Future" capital campaign. We saw generous giving as folks began to fulfill their campaign pledges. Let's keep this up in 2017! Every pledge payment brings us closer to being able to break ground on this exciting project.

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.

At any time, we welcome new or augmented pledges to the building fund. For more information about this exciting project, please contact capitalcampaign@iucc.org. Thank you! Because of your generous investment in our future, we are 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 environmental stewards, and live in peace.

~ Anne Rosse



This rendering illustrates current Phase 1a planning.

Be sure to attend the Winter Congregational Meeting to hear an update on the building plans. In the meantime, please contact btfchair@iucc.org or any task force member with your questions.

Moderator's Column

by Renae Boyum



What an amazing year 2016 was in the life of IUCC! We approved a capital campaign, then moved forward with a building project that will provide additional office and meeting space. We build so that we can continue to make a difference both here in Irvine and the community beyond. We celebrated the 10 year anniversary of our beloved Pastor with gifts and notes of thanks to Pastor

Paul and look forward to more years of his dynamic leadership. We commemorated our 25 years of being an Open and Affirming congregation and culminated this with a celebration of renewal and welcoming back our Pastor Emeritus, Fred Plumer. Those are just *some* highlights of a faith community that moves forward with commitment and a passion for social justice.

What will 2017 bring us? Where are we on our journey? How can we continue to be the church God is calling us to be? In addition to the ongoing programs and activities of IUCC, several major undertakings are key to the future. The Building Task Force (Anne Rosse - Chair, Mark Allen, Keith Boyum, Cindy O'Dell, Jim Raver, Pat Sauter, Michael Spindle and Pastor Paul) has had several meetings with our architects, domussstudioarchitecture. They have begun envisioning the details of our new building space and how it will best serve our needs. The goal is to be back in front of the Congregation in May 2017 with bids and permits in hand, ready to put "shovels in the ground" by the end of the summer. It is truly an exciting time for our church!

We are not just building buildings for the purpose of having more meeting and office space: we are also building buildings to house programs and activities. What will those programs and activities look like in the next five years? That question will be answered under the leadership of our Long Range Planning Task Force (Keith Boyum - Chair, Jessie Billings, Steve Goetz, Cindy O'Dell, Greg Woolfson, and Pastor Paul). Over the next few months they will be discussing, planning, meeting with individuals and groups, and formulating a Long Range Plan that will guide us as we move ahead. They will describe their work thus far at our Winter Congregational Meeting in January. To date, they have concentrated on gathering information about church and community, and drafting for further discussion an analysis of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats. The goal is to have a plan ready for presentation at the May 2017 Congregational Meeting.

One more highlight of 2017 will be Pastor Paul's sabbatical leave. As part of his call, Paul is granted a sabbatical leave of three months every five years. Paul will be taking his second sabbatical this coming summer. In preparation for this, Dawn Price - working with Paul - wrote an application for a Lilly Foundation grant. Lilly grants provide financial support to pastors who will be on sabbatical and also provides support for the congregation while the pastor is away. It is a very competitive, highly sought after award, and Pastor Paul's plans were strong enough to receive one. He will be sharing details of his plans for the upcoming leave. While he is on leave, we want to ensure that the church keeps on running smoothly and most importantly that we continue to have meaningful worship services. Beginning in January, our Adult Programs Director, the Reverend Steve Swope, will chair a committee to make those plans. As details become more clear, they will be sharing them with all of us. The goal is to have a final plan in place by May, 2017.

Clearly the next few months will be full of activity and planning. And it looks like the May Congregational Meeting is one not to be missed -- so mark MAY 21 on your new 2017 calendar right away!

I'm looking forward to 2017 and hope you are too!

In faith and community,

Renae

**Please welcome these new members from
December 4, 2016**



L to R: Megan Dukett, Rachel Stumpf, Glenna Matthews, Apoorva Ghosh, and Jeannie Lee (with son)



GreenFaith Team

Committed to Environmental Justice



Pachamama Alliance

by Karen Smith

After becoming active at IUCC and discovering GreenFaith and the church's upcoming commitment to Creation Justice, I realized how compatible it is with Pachamama Alliance, a global movement dedicated to an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet.

For me, Pachamama Alliance and its programs provide the motivation and the tools to be a positive social activist in community with like-minded persons. It has given me hope in uncertain times. As a facilitator for the Pachamama Alliance, I hope to be able to share a Symposium with IUCC in the near future. What follows is from the Pachamama website: <https://www.pachamama.org/about/mission>

Mission: To empower indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest to preserve their lands and culture and, using insights gained from that work, to educate and inspire individuals everywhere to bring forth a thriving, just and sustainable world.

Vision: The vision that informs the Pachamama Alliance's work is of a world that works for everyone: an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet – a New Dream for humanity.

Purpose: Pachamama Alliance, empowered by its partnership with indigenous people, is dedicated to bringing forth this vision. Its unique contribution is to generate and engage people everywhere in transformational conversations and experiences consistent with this purpose. It weaves together indigenous and modern worldviews such that human beings are in touch with their dignity and are ennobled by the magnificence, mystery, and opportunity of what is possible for humanity at this time. It inspires and galvanizes the human family to generate a critical mass of conscious commitment to a thriving, just and sustainable way of life on Earth. It is committed to transforming human systems and structures that separate us, and to transforming our relationships with ourselves, with one another, and with the natural world.

Selected Guiding Values and Principles:

- The universe is friendly and the evolutionary Force that put the stars in motion is still moving through

all of us and is a dynamic, self-organizing process whose grace and guidance we can trust.

- Human beings are not separate from each other or Nature. We are totally interrelated and our actions have consequences to all.
- People's actions are correlated with how they see the world – the story they tell themselves about the world. Transforming the way people see and relate to the world and the possibilities they see for the future is a powerful way to effect social change.

I look forward to sharing more with you in the future.

~ Karen Smith for the GREENfaith team (Vivian Johnson, Judy Curry, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Carol Getz, and Eileen Vincent)

Miss Lily's Green Tips

Dear Readers,

My niece has decided to become a vegetarian for one day of the week. It is part of her GreenFaith program. By being vegetarian for just one day, she will reduce the water intake of the ranching work. She will change her economics.



I was inspired by her intention. So, I, too, will become a vegetarian for one day of the week. Perhaps, it will affect the world. At the very least, it will affect my economics.

Perhaps, you, dear Reader, can become a vegetarian for a day, too.

*Happy New Year,
Miss Lily*

Coffee Hour hosts needed!

Ah, coffee hour snacks! They're yummy, they're colorful, and they provide a wonderful backdrop of warmth and welcome to our patio after services. Happy IUCC people gather around the snack tables to visit, catch up with friends, and meet interesting new people. It doesn't happen by magic, though - our coffee hour snacks are provided by volunteers. Won't you add your name to the list of volunteers? Sign up sheets are on the patio on Sunday mornings.



Members of Jim Aynes' Comma Group hosted Coffee Hour on January 1.

L to R: Glenda Wyant, Ken Wyant, Tricia Aynes, Teri Olson, Jim Aynes, Nancy Dreckman, Susie Lang, and Dale Lang.

IUCC Music Ministry

by Joni Baker

January - that pensive time of year to reflect on the past twelve months. The time to contemplate what the next calendar year could bring. New Year's resolutions are often broken by the time you read this article! *Time Magazine* listed the top 10 commonly broken New Year's resolutions. Among them were: learn something new, be less stressed, and volunteer. Guess what? I have a perfect way to keep all three of those resolutions: volunteer to sing in the Chancel Choir! Studies have shown that choral singing reduces stress. If you have never sung in a choir before, you will also be learning something completely new. If you have sung in choir, you at least get to learn new music, which is great for the brain as well as the spirit. Volunteering to sing in the Chancel Choir is one of the most enjoyable ways to give service that I know. Our first rehearsal of the new year is Thursday, January 12th from 7:15-9:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. Come join us!



I also want to take an opportunity, on behalf of the Music Ministry, to thank all of you who came to our Winter Solstice concert and brought friends (see entire choir pictured below). We had a full house and raised over \$2,000 for the IUCC general fund. The choir works so hard and it was a treat to share music with so many of you. Thank you for your continued support.

IUCC's Chancel Choir at Winter Solstice concert on December 11, 2016



IUCC News & Events



BEFORE THE FLOOD (FILM)

Sunday * Jan. 22 * 12:15 pm
* Plumer Hall *

In this 90 minute film, follow Leonardo DiCaprio as he travels around the globe to witness first hand the devastating effects of climate change and what needs to be done to solve the climate crisis. Discover the many solutions we can implement today, which will prevent the worst impacts of climate change and unlock a clean energy revolution. A light lunch will be provided.

Sponsored by:

IUCC GREENfaith Committee
IUCC Adult Education Ministry
IUCC Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry



JANUARY

1/13	Tricia Aynes	1/27	Roseann Landis
1/23	Joni Baker	1/26	Joan McDonald
1/22	Adele Bloom	1/01	Kieran Mitchell
1/27	Isabella Burley	1/18	Joan Mortenson
1/01	Emily Cordes	1/10	Eugene Price
1/01	Paul Duncan	1/10	Barbara Ruris
1/18	Felicity Figueroa	1/27	Chris Sanders
1/23	Nancy Harris	1/09	Cesar Sangalang
1/05	Eric Houston	1/13	Bonnie Shaffstall
1/01	David Humme	1/18	Bill Sheak
1/10	Laura Kemp	1/01	Coquelicot Shirey
1/20	Marilyn KeslerWest	1/07	Jan Wilson



WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Wednesday * Jan. 4 * 6:30 p.m.

Join us for good fellowship and a soup and salad bar! Bring a salad fixing to share.



MORE THAN JUST BLACK & WHITE

Saturday * Jan. 21 * 5-9 p.m.

Woodbridge Community Center
IUCC Winter Party and All Church
Bon Vivant combined theme party.



2017 BUDGET FORUM

Sunday * Jan. 22 * 12:15 p.m.

* Sanctuary *

Learn more about the proposed 2017 budget being presented to the congregation for approval at the Winter Meeting.



2017 WINTER

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday * Jan. 29 * 12:15 p.m.

Annual meeting for our corporate members to vote to adopt the budget and to conduct other church business. All voting members are asked to attend.



Friends of Orange County Detainees

Book Drive

We are collecting books to donate to the libraries at James A. Musick, Theo Lacy and Santa Ana Jail facilities.

* ANY paperback * ANY language * ANY subject *

* ANY reading level * Please, no hardbacks

Collection will be between now and January 21, 2017.

Please bring your books to IUCC (collection container is in the Narthex).

I'm Falling in Love ... with John

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

I have been terrified of John for some 55 years. He's complicated, threatening, outrageous at times, secretive and almost unintelligible. I wanted to have nothing to do with him. He was poison.

Then a strange thing happened. My wife and I had been tutoring inmates at the local jail on Tuesday afternoons, but the jail changed leadership and no longer needed us. Now I was free to go to the weekly Tuesday Bible study at our church. They were "studying" the Gospel of John and were led by our own creative, funny, knowledgeable retired UCC pastor, the Rev. Ken Wyant. I went, with a big chip on my shoulder, to set the class straight...John was a nut case.

But Ken placated me and kept on teaching about the power inside of John's Gospel. All of a sudden, John started making sense. Whoa! So, I bought Bishop John Spong's book, "*The Fourth Gospel: Tale of a Jewish Mystic*." This book clarified so much for me and suddenly, I saw and felt the power of this Gospel.

How did this happen? After all, it's the same John as it was in seminary, almost 60 years ago. Obviously, I had not delved into John deeply enough. Maybe I wasn't ready. John is complicated. He was part of a school whose members were Jewish. By the time we saw John in the public arena, the Jesus movement had been expelled from Judaism (88CE). The gentiles had taken over and, most of the time, they read the Gospels as literal truth. They did not, and still don't, understand the Jewish way of telling their religious history. It's full of metaphors, cultural innuendoes, secret sayings and mysticism. That could explain a great deal why John terrified me. I am a gentile. I didn't really understand the concept of "midrash," which is the art of interpreting a story to find the real meaning inside. An example can be found in the story of the wedding feast story in Cana where Jesus takes six large jars of water used for purification and makes it into 150 gallons of premium wine. Many Christians believe Jesus really did this and see him as one of the great wine makers of the first century (John 2:1-12). But if one reads that story "through Jewish eyes," one realizes that it is a story that tells us the old Israel (purification water) has been replaced by the new Israel (new wine) and the transforming message of Jesus' agape love.

I learned a great lesson here: to grow as a follower one must **always** be open to an evolving faith. It should not and cannot stagnate. I realized that I had closed the door in John's face, inhibiting me from growing. Not a good thing!

Thanks to Pastor Ken and Bishop Spong, I am being challenged to grow some more in my faith. John's Gospel has opened the door for me to do just that. I am now in a new "room" filled with all kinds of new possibilities as to how my faith can continue to grow through the reading and understanding of John's gospel.



In my 60 years of ministry, over and over, I have seen the transforming message of Jesus' agape turn the ordinary (you and me) into the extraordinary (you and me on agape). It just happened.

Where are you on your faith journey? Has it grown during your lifetime with new findings and new experiences? Or is it stagnant? I hope not!

In preparation for my new book, "Cramming for the Finals," due out in May 2017, I have opened a web and blog site: [www. peacelovejoyhope.com](http://www.peacelovejoyhope.com). The blog changes every Friday. I invite you to take a peek.

Peace Love Joy Hope

Fr. Bil Aulenbach

The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity

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

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

Powerful Parenting

Dr. Lorraine Fox

FEEDBACK: WHAT AND HOW, NOT WHY

We're continuing our discussion of providing feedback to someone who is demonstrating a lack of self-awareness, and thus does not understand why other people respond to them as they do. We've outlined some "conditions" for effective feedback based on the understanding that it is very difficult to hear versions of yourself that are different from those you have of yourself. We've talked about the necessity for trust, so that your child, or any other person in your life, knows that you are having this challenging conversation only because you value them and your relationship with them. We've acknowledged that feedback never "makes" anyone change, but rather provides the opportunity for self-examination that may prompt a desire to make changes that will make getting along with others easier. We've clarified that feedback is an observation of behavior, not a judgment on behavior. Last month we outlined the importance of giving feedback only in the context of a relationship where both positive observations and negative observations have been provided in the past. This month we'll discuss the importance of avoiding any guesses about "motives" for a given behavior, since we can never really be sure **why** someone does what they do. Only the person producing a given behavior knows what their intentions are. Implying reasons or motives for behavior is a sure way to completely interfere with what you are trying to accomplish with feedback. Primarily this is because the conversation will veer off into a discussion of motive, rather than a discussion of behavior, and the effect of that behavior.

I'm guessing that most of you who are reading this column have had an experience of someone guessing incorrectly about your intention or what you were "trying" to do, and you know how annoying this guessing game is. As soon as you hear something like "I know you were only trying to..." or "just because you..." you feel yourself getting tense and angry. Silently you are saying to yourself: "You don't know what I was trying to do; you don't know how I feel," etc. Remember those feelings when you are giving feedback to another person, because they will feel the same way. There are only two things we are trying to accomplish with feedback: 1. We are trying to provide a description of behavior as we observed it. 2. We are describing the **effect** that behavior has on us and/or other people.

When people have poor self-awareness, they are frequently puzzled about why people react to them differently than they expect them to, or want them to. The gift of feedback is a clear description of what was heard, or seen, in addition to how it was experienced. It is often the case that the

effect on others of a person's behavior is not at all what they had in mind or wanted to accomplish, and this is why it's important to give them a chance to understand their behavior from another person's point of view.

What we want the other person to know is that the way they came across had an effect on us, and what that effect was. It is then up to the person to figure out what went wrong when their intention was so misunderstood. Or, if the behavior was consistent with their intention, they will have the opportunity to take responsibility for any harm that was done by acting a certain way.

For example, if a child/teen really, really wants to do something or go someplace that is very important to them, they will try to convince their parent to let them do what they want or go where they want. When they begin to yell, or stomp, or get angry or disrespectful because they fear they will not get their way, we want them to realize that rather than conveying how important something is to them, they are conveying disrespect, rudeness, and immaturity. It is important for them to learn how to "match" their **intention** to their presentation of a request. If they don't, the discussion takes an unfortunate turn into a discussion of how they are interacting rather than what they are requesting. (The same is true of adults, of course).

On the other hand, if a certain kind of behavior was **intended** to hurt someone, we want to explain how the way they acted did in fact cause hurt, and how that emotional pain is now interfering with the relationship. "I was only trying to..." is not an excuse for hurtful behavior, and feedback allows them to experience the dramatic effect on other people. So whether a behavior "matches" someone's intention, or not, feedback gives them the "mirror" they need to learn how they are being perceived, and to decide if that is how they want to be perceived.

The only thing people have available to them to "connect" with other people is behavior – what we say, what we do, and how we do it. If we don't understand how the ways we act and speak are affecting others, we lack the skill we need to make that bond with others that forms the crux of living. We need family, friends, acquaintances, pets, to feel whole and human. It doesn't really matter why we do what we do to others; it matters what we say and what we do and how others receive it. So leave the "why" alone; stick to the what, and how you feel when you see or hear it, and leave the person who is behaving to decide whether they want to keep doing what they're doing, the way they're doing it, or whether they'd like to use the feedback to make some improvements. We haven't been told that the truth will make us happy, but it will "set us free" to decide to act in ways that get us the desired effect.