

April 2024 | www.iucc.org | Catch up with us on Facebook, Insta, Tiktok, and YouTube!

OPEN AND AFFIRMING · JUST PEACE · GLOBAL MISSION · CREATION JUSTICE/GREEN FAITH

We didn't let the rain dampen our spirits on Easter morning!

Our wonderful choir, gorgeous Easter lilies, and delicious crepes made it a memorable Sunday



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes



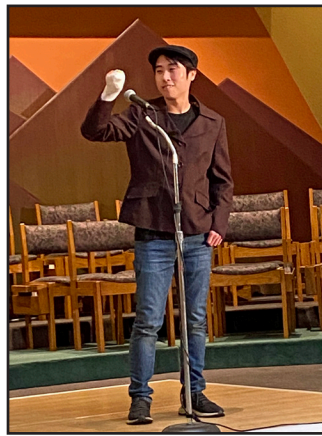
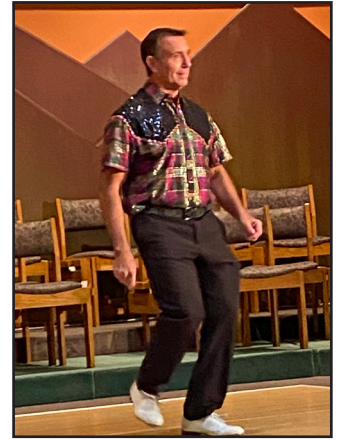
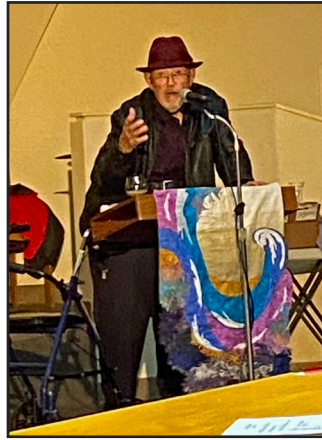
Pictures from Palm Sunday on March 24



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes



Pictures from IUCC's Got Talent/Chili Cook Off night on March 9



The chilis were delicious, and there were many outstanding performances in the multigenerational Talent Show! Acts included dancing, singing, yoyo tricks, puppet shows, original songs, oral interpretation, ventriloquism, and a science experiment. Special thanks to our esteemed judges (on left), who delivered lots of witty commentary, and our choral ensemble (on right) who opened the show with a fun show tune!

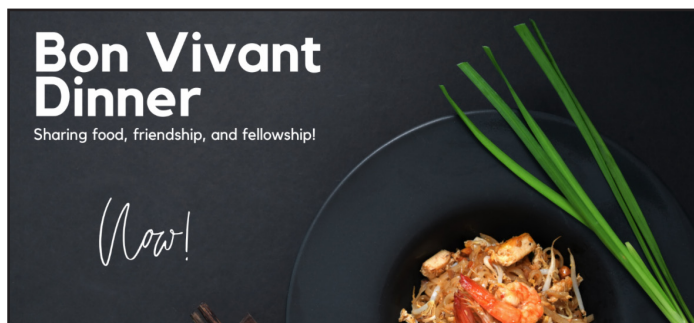
Below left: Alex Ingal scored the coveted Best Chili Award, and he and Princess Daisy won the Best Ensemble Talent Award.



Photos by Tricia Aynes & Glenda Wyant



Coming Attractions



Bon Vivant Dinners Return!

We hope becoming better acquainted at IUCG is one of your 2024 goals, because Bon Vivant is your easy and enjoyable way to meet fellow IUCGers. BV is a once-a-month dinner hosted by a volunteer and open to everyone. The size is limited to 8-10 guests. The host provides the main dish and non-alcoholic beverages with each guest bringing a side dish or beverage to share. We meet monthly on the fourth Saturday. You'll find the sign-up sheet at our Sunday information table, or you can text Debra Banwell at 949-433-1494 to sign-up for the dinner on April 27.



Women to Women: Second Date! Tuesday, April 30, from 6-7:30 p.m.

Our first "date" between IUCG women and University Synagogue women was so successful that we decided to do it again! Please come on Tuesday, April 30, from 6-7:30 p.m. for our "second date" as we seek to further deepen our friendship with this vibrant and interesting group of women from our sister congregation. Join us for food, fellowship, and sharing! Sign-ups begin on April 1.

The women of the synagogue were such gracious hostesses at our last get-together, and we'd love to return the favor with some wonderful hospitality of our own! Many hands make light work, and we'd greatly appreciate your help to make this event truly special. Since we know you're planning to attend anyway (and who wouldn't?!), why not assist in one of the following ways:

- Set up or clean up
- Do check-in & distribute name tags
- Bring a fruit or veggie tray (for 10-12 people)
- Bring a cheese & protein tray (for 10-12 people, no pork please)
- Provide an inexpensive bottle of wine

Please let us know if you can help when you RSVP to Marilyn marilynsmithmsw@yahoo.com. You may also sign up on the patio between services on April 14 and April 21. This event is free, but reservations are a must because space is limited and we need to know how many to plan for. Registration will close on April 23, so reserve your spot now to be sure you don't miss out!

- Marilyn Smith & Tricia Aynes, Event Coordinators



Women's Discussion Group: Digging Deeper

IUCG women who want to "dig deeper" into spiritual questions, gratitude, and epiphanies of the soul are invited to join a new discussion group meeting from 5:30 to 7 pm on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month in the church meeting rooms. Just come with an intent to share from your heart. For more information, contact Marilyn Smith at marilynsmithmsw@yahoo.com.



Creativity Sunday at IUCC on April 14, 2024

We're having a very special event during the coffee hour. Recognizing that God the Creator imbued our world with creativity, we will have table displays of various creative endeavors by members and visitors for both viewing and purchase. We invite you to share your creative endeavor. Do you bake, paint, make jewelry, write, carve or do wood-work, knit, sew, throw pots, take photos, design cards, make pot gardens? Something else?

Please contact Vivian Johnson if you would like to share your creativity that morning. Again, it is both for viewing and purchase.



IUCC Work Day on Sunday, April 28 from 12:30 p.m. onward

Here's your chance to roll up your sleeves and do some much-needed sprucing up of our campus! We have a list of tasks to tackle, and one of them is just right for you. Watch your e-blasts on more details of how you can contribute to the beauty of our church.



Save the Date for our Boots & Bingo Drag Wild West Event!

Our Drag Bingo events are such fun, and another one is coming soon! Join Queen Cucu Chanel and friends for an enjoyable evening of great performances, yummy food, and prizes. Watch your e-blasts for a chance to sign up! These events sell out quickly.

Women's Retreat May 3-5



Every year (minus the Covid years), the women of IUCC gather at Pilgrim Pines near Yucaipa, CA, to get to know each other, share meals, laugh, worship and learn.

This year's retreat will be May 3-5 and features the Rev. Terry LePage as she leads us through "Living as if Earth matters." In three sessions starting Friday night and continuing through Saturday late afternoon, she will guide us in large and small group discussions:

- **Nurturing Deep Roots:** Exploring what grounds and nurtures us as women, church goers and residents of planet Earth
- **Courageous Composting:** Facing and transforming the ugliness and grief in our lives, including grief at the state of the world. All griefs will be honored.
- **Planting Seeds:** Turning faith into action.

In addition to the weekend-themed workshops, we'll be able to choose among additional workshops, discussion groups, nature hikes and crafts. Saturday night promises to be full of fun and laughter and the perfect opportunity for fellowship with IUCC members and friends.

Sunday morning worship will continue the weekend's theme and will be led by both Terry LePage and Jerri Davenport. Communion will be offered and is open to all.

The cost of the retreat is \$170 and includes two nights of comfortable beds, five meals, snacks and Sunday morning

worship. Because of the way Pilgrim Pines Camp fee structure, there will no longer be discounts for those coming less than the full session although people are still free to skip Friday night or leave Saturday night. But we encourage everyone to come for the full session to get the most out of the weekend. Campership funds may be requested to help defray costs.

Sign ups continue between church services at IUCC through April 12. Late requests can be made by email until Friday, April 19, at noon.

For more information contact a member of the retreat committee: Laura Long, Lorraine Fox, Marilyn Smith, Jerri Davenport, Terry LePage, Pat Sauter or Cindy O'Dell. Late registration requests should be sent to Lorraine Fox at pgfsc@cox.net and cc'ing Cindy O'Dell at odellcindy19@gmail.com.

Space is limited so there's a possibility that late requests will not be able to be honored.

We hope to see you there! And yes, your friends are welcome to join us.

"A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new." – Albert Einstein

- Cindy O'Dell

From the Senior Pastor

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



As I reflect on the season of Lent and our celebration of Easter, I am reflecting on the cross. I am not a big cross person, perhaps because I associate it so much with the torture inflicted upon Jesus, its use among Romans as a lesson to teach others. For me, Jesus' death is not an atonement for sin, so I'm less inclined to wear a cross as a symbol of my faith. I suppose if I were to choose a symbol that fits my declaration of faith, it would likely be that of communion: the bread and the cup. They show Jesus' intentional commitment to sit down and break bread, to feed the masses, to sustain lives and souls, and the act of doing so with anyone who was hungry regardless of social class or status. That's a powerful symbol for me.

Crosses for us have become so benign. They are necklaces adorning our chests, a sign of our allegiance, our faith-tribe. They come in silver or gold or wood. Perhaps they're so commonplace we forget the original intent. Jesus was hung on the cross with other criminals just outside the city so anyone coming in would know that if they tried to act up they'd be killed. I suppose at some level the cross makes me angry at empire and oppressors. It fires me up to fight injustice—so it certainly has a purpose in my life. But I still wince when I see a cross, a reminder of death.

So perhaps that's why the ritual of the transformation of the cross on Easter Sunday means so much to me. That wooden cross looms over us on Maundy Thursday, foretelling Good Friday's horror. It's right there in the middle of it all. Overlooking the last supper, there for Judas' kiss of betrayal, it overhears Peter deny Jesus, and it's right there when the Romans mock him and beat him. And of course, it is at the cross they crucify him for all to see.

But come Sunday morning, that very same cross is out to greet us before our Sunday service. And someone puts a flower on the cross. Then another person comes and does the same. Then another, and another. The children

come and smiling, they add their flowers, fresh cut from their garden that morning. One after another come—each adding their own unique flower, a representation of themselves in some way—a unique color, fragrance, or bloom. And before you know it that cross, the instrument of torture that was used to invoke fear and compliance, has truly been transformed! It's not only beautiful, it requires that each of us contribute. Each of us bring a bit of ourselves, a piece of our lives, a gift of love, to make the transformation possible. It can't be done by one person or one flower alone. Its beauty comes because of an act of choice made by many.



To me, this illustrates Christian community. It's how we live with the evils of our world, the injustices that are so beyond our control. We face them. But we don't meet evil for evil, torture with torture. Instead, we transform. By the act of our individual gifts, we communally transform. And somehow, through the serendipity of our actions, we create something uniquely beautiful.

Perhaps by nature it's fleeting ... but that's why we know we must keep at it. It's a continual process. But if you ask me ... this is Easter!

So - happy Easter, Church! I'm so thankful to be in community with you. I'm grateful for the ways each of you gives of yourself. It's so hard to face the Good Fridays of our world, the places where crucifixion is ongoing and Easter longings seem to never be satiated. Yet we do our best to hold the tension, to be unafraid to name the injustice and face the cross, so we can be a part of resurrection.

Our Easter celebration was truly beautiful. From the colorful cross of transformation in the narthex, to the amazing music at both services, the lilies that herald good news, the story that has carried us throughout our lives made fresh as we saw it anew through Peter's eyes.

I've really loved traveling with Peter this season. In my nearly 20 years of ministry, I've never spent that much

From the Senior Pastor continued from page 7

time with him. To be honest, I like Peter a whole lot more now. I had often been dismissive of him before, but now I see him, I feel like I know him, and in some ways I feel like I am him! We have one more week of the series coming up the first Sunday in April as Peter's story continues.

We have a lot of special worships planned for you this month! On April 14th we're celebrating Creativity Sunday, an opportunity to reflect on the creativity of our Creator and how we have been imbued with this divine creativity to create ourselves. During our worship service we'll reflect upon the creative artistic gifts of many in our congregation and during coffee hour (from 10:30am-11:15am) we'll have a Creativity Fair where our members will share their creations! Some of them will even be available for purchase with a portion of the proceeds donated back to support IUCC. Then on April 21 we'll celebrate Earth Day! This is a great time to reflect upon our Green Faith Commitments and ways we can care for Creation. April 28 is Pacific Islander Asian American Sunday and we're participating in a pulpit exchange! Several UCC churches in our conference are switching places and we're very excited that the Rev. Sam Tialavea, pastor at Faaaligo o le Alofa -Vision of Grace church UCC, will be joining us all the way from Las Vegas! And our contribution to the pulpit exchange will be sending our talented Youth Coordinator, Dustin Nguyen to preach at Montebello Plymouth Congregational UCC. I am really looking forward to this Sunday and am excited that Dustin will represent us, happy that we can be part of this wider church exchange!

Be sure to check out all of our events this month! I'm excited about our new partnership with Goodwill. Join me on Friday, April 5th, at 10am for the Grand Opening ribbon cutting! Goodwill be on site Fridays and Saturdays for drop-offs. We'll also be taking a field trip to learn more about the work of Goodwill on Wednesday, April 17th. It will take place at 11am. We'll carpool from IUCC at 10:30am (or you can meet us there). RSVP to me to sign up! I'm really looking forward to learning about all the good work they do and celebrating our new participation in making that good work happen!

Thank you, IUCC, for being Easter people a part of the transformation!

In Easter Joy,
Pastor Sarah

IUCC at GAWI!

IUCC's Advocates for Peace & Justice was pleased to have a table at the Great American Write-In on March 9. The free event, sponsored by *Women For: Orange County*, a non-partisan women's group, is offered to the public every year to provide attendees with the means to influence policy decisions by writing letters to their legislators. Our own Felicity Figueroa heads up this very popular and highly worthwhile event each year. We were delighted to spot some friendly IUCC faces among the crowd!

Photos by Tricia Aynes & Pastor Sarah



Membership at IUCC

Welcome

**Membership at IUCC? How to learn more about us?
How to join this progressive faith community?**

We have many visitors to IUCC each and every Sunday. Hopefully, they are met with an “extravagant” welcome. The members of the Membership Ministry try to collect contact information on our visitors so we can invite them to a *Welcome Luncheon*. The luncheons (beautifully hosted by Pat Sauter) start with a brief tour of our facilities and end up in Plumer Hall. We share a meal and then ask our visitors to share (whatever they are comfortable with) their faith journey and what brought them to IUCC. The stories are powerful and remind all of us of the importance of IUCC as a sanctuary and a place where “all are truly welcome.”

UPCOMING LUNCHEONS are scheduled for **April 21 and June 2**. ***If you are interested in attending one of these events, please contact iucc@iucc.org or pastorsarah@iucc.org***

After the luncheon, you will be invited to become a member of IUCC. For some of our visitors, this happens right after the luncheon, while others want to wait and see so they can experience more of what IUCC has to offer. The joining ritual is a simple one and invites the new members and the current members to join in a covenant of mutual support.

JOINING events are scheduled for **May 5 and June 16**. ***If you are interested in joining IUCC, please contact iucc@iucc.org or pastorsarah@iucc.org***.

-Rena Boyum, Membership Ministry Chair

New Beginnings invites you to lunch



New Beginnings invites you to a casual luncheon celebrating Eid, our 2nd birthday, and our partners & Afghan friends.

New Beginnings, our church collaborative supporting Afghan refugees, would like you to join us at a luncheon celebration of Eid al-Fitr. Eid is celebrated by Muslims worldwide and it marks the end of the month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan. Our families will be bringing some food from their culture and you are welcome to bring food or drinks to share also (no pork please).

If you choose to share food, please bring your own bowls, plates and all serving utensils you would normally use to serve your dish. We will supply beverages.

When: Sunday, April 14, 12:00 - 2:00 pm

Where: Irvine United Congregational Church - Plumer Hall
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA 92604

Please, please RSVP by replying to this email so we can know how many to prepare for no later than Monday, April 8. You may also text Steve Goetz at 949-436-1946. Thanks.

Legacy Circle



...ensuring our future



Greetings fellow IUC members,

As the majority of you know, IUC was the beneficiary of an incredibly generous bequest earlier this year by our late fellow congregation member, Lynn Carpenter. This bequest did not happen by accident. It was planned, and thankfully so, given that Lynn was taken prematurely in her retirement years. Not ever knowing what's around the corner, Lynn's savvy preparation of a will/trust insured that IUC received the gift that she intended, leaving an incredible legacy.

This time last year, the Fund Development Committee brought to your attention a very worthwhile free seminar series conducted by a legitimate not-for-profit organization called ItsYourMoneyAndEstate.org (www.iyme.org) that is focused on financial and estate literacy. It is sponsored by many reputable local and national organizations that you will certainly recognize. They offer both Zoom and in-person workshops, one focusing on "It's Your Money!" dealing primarily with financial planning and the other "It's Your Estate" dealing with estate law, healthcare and power of attorney, will and estates, retirement asset planning, charitable opportunities, and estate administration.

While both seminars are important, Lynn's legacy underscores the importance of participating in "It's Your Estate" whose first webinar begins on April 26 and the other series webinar begins on April 25. There are five workshops in each series. In person workshops are present in Newport Beach, Brea, Orange, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Irvine, Huntington Beach, Mission Viejo, Fullerton, and Laguna Beach. So, there is an in person location near you. The

earliest of these begins April 3, though the majority begin a couple of weeks later. Therefore, please be sure to check out the dates in your location ASAP to register for this free workshop series.

Two of my best friends found this series so valuable that they actually have taken it twice. Another couple wholeheartedly endorsed both series. Hopefully there are those among you that took the series last year. I would like to ask that anyone who signed up last year or who signs up this year let me know and give me your feedback about it.

For those of you who have made preparations and intend to include IUC in your estate planning, please contact me with regard to adding your name to those below already on the list of IUC's Legacy Circle. For more information regarding our Legacy Circle, click on this link: <https://iucc.org/give>. There you will find an FAQ link <https://iucc.org/legacy-circle> and this link to download a confidential bequest intention form <https://iucc.org/s/IUC-Confidential-Bequest-Intention-Form.pdf>.

This is such an easy thing to procrastinate about. However, this is too important, for it goes beyond just your legacy. For the sake of your loved ones, don't leave the future to chance. Make sure your wishes are known. For further information, don't hesitate to reach out to Duane Vajrt at djvmd@icloud.com or contact 949-795-7318 or Bill Lawrence at walawrence@icloud.com or 949-375-0418.

In earnest,

Duane Vajrt & Bill Lawrence
Fund Development committee co-chairs



LEGACY CIRCLE SCROLL

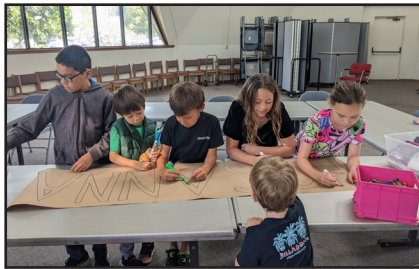
Anonymous
Keith and Renae Boyum
Connie Jones
Glenna Matthews
Brian Percy-Schofield & David Schofield
Marilyn Smith
William Lawrence & Jeff Stuckhardt
Jeffrey Benedick & Duane Vajrt, M. D.
Craig Tyrl

Lent and Easter at IUCC

by Tristen Reineccius, MYP Director



Creating the Hosanna sign & getting ready for the Palm Sunday processional



Preparing for the Easter egg hunt

This year's Easter event at IUCC began with an atmosphere of excitement, as families gathered in the church courtyard in their colorful rain jackets and prepared with umbrellas if necessary. Far from being deterred by the weather, our overjoyed children embraced the sense of adventure that awaited them. What initially unfolded was your typical Easter egg hunt, but followed by our rather creative combination of tradition and innovation—a scavenger hunt interwoven with riddles and clues that echoed our Lenten journey and classic IUCC moments. Instead of simply scouring the grounds for hidden treasures, participants embarked on a journey similar to one we saw during Lent piecing together clues that challenged their intellect and creativity.

Guided by the church community, teams set out on their quest armed with nothing but their sharp minds and a thirst for adventure. Each cryptic message decoded brought them closer to uncovering the coveted Easter prizes hidden within the church grounds at the very end. Laughter and excitement filled the air as the hunt progressed. What became evident was that this was more than just an egg hunt—it was a celebration of community, resilience, and the joy of discovery. In the face of adversity, IUCC's Easter egg hunt participants embraced the spirit of togetherness, demonstrating that happiness and fulfillment can be found even in the simplest of pleasures. As the final eggs were discovered and the last clues unraveled, participants gathered once more in the warmth of the church, their hearts full and spirits uplifted.

This event exemplified our celebration of the Lenten journey of the heart this year with MYP. Throughout Lent, we guided students through lessons that deepened their understanding of faith and community, rounding out their spiritual growth. The Easter egg hunt served as a perfect culmination of this journey, reinforcing the values of inclusivity, camaraderie, and joy that define our vibrant IUCC community. As the echoes of laughter faded into the distance and the rain subsided, it became abundantly clear: at IUCC, the true essence of Easter lies not merely in the search for hidden treasures, but in the discovery of boundless joy through the embrace of one another as cherished members of our beloved community.



Family Movie Night: The Lego Movie Edition!

Join us at Plumer Hall on Saturday, April 20, from 7-9 p.m. for a delightful Family Movie Night featuring "The Lego Movie." Bring your blankets and favorite movie snack to share for a cozy evening under the stars filled with laughter, love, and community. Don't miss this chance for a memorable cinematic experience with friends and family! See you at the movies!

Improv(e) Your Life

by Dustin Nguyen, Youth Coordinator



For Jr. Youth Drama Day, the kids acted out characters from Disney movies using only physical gestures

March 17th was “Jr. Youth Drama Day” at IUCC. The kids had lots of fun with theater and improv games, learning to think on their feet, and playing Disney-character charades!

Kids are naturally good at spontaneity and play, but these skills become sadly lost as we grow up. Learning improv is a great way to reconnect with that inner child and regain that sense of spontaneity.

Improv isn’t just about making people laugh on stage. It’s a superpower that helps you in many facets of life. When you learn improv, you become better at lots of things, not just acting funny.

One great thing about improv is that it teaches you how to better communicate with others. You learn to really listen, think quickly, and share your ideas well. These are all important skills for socializing or doing a good job at work and in life.

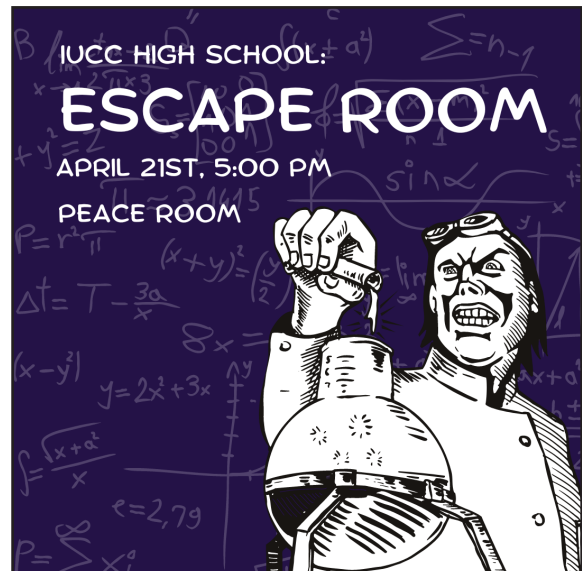
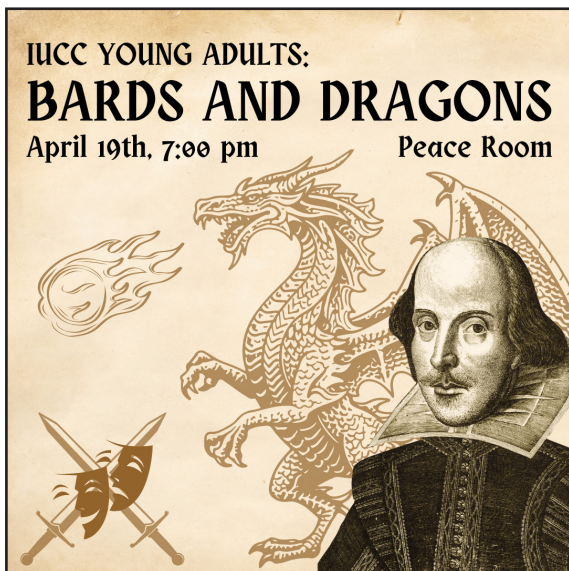
Improv also teaches you to remain confident when things don’t go as planned. Life is full of surprises, and improv helps you handle them like a champ. Instead of getting upset when something goes wrong, you learn to say, “Yes!” and roll with the punches.

Another cool thing about improv is that it shows you how to work better in teams. In an improv scene, you learn to support your scene partner(s), add to their ideas, and create a whacky scenario together. These are skills that carry over into school projects, at your job, or even when playing games with friends.

Improv also helps you be more creative. It encourages you to think of new ideas and see things from different angles. This can be really helpful when you’re trying to solve problems or come up with fun things to do.

Lastly, improv can make you feel good too! It’s like playing a fun game where everyone’s included. You get more confident, feel happier, and let loose.

So, learning improv isn’t just about being funny. It’s about becoming better at talking with others, expecting the unexpected, working in teams, being creative, and feeling good. Improv is a superpower that’ll improv(e) your life!



You can play with my Legos, Grandma

by Tricia Aynes

“What do you do all day when I’m not there, Grandma?” Blake wanted to know. At 8 years old, he is starting to think more about what goes on in other people’s lives. We see each other a lot and have some interesting conversations. I talk with him like he’s a mini-adult.

I paused for a moment to think of a response that would be simple while satisfying his curiosity. “Well, I read the newspaper, do the crossword puzzle, grocery shop, cook, exercise, work on church projects, watch TV, go to lunch with my friends - that sort of thing.”

“I know all that. But what do you DO?” he persisted.

I repeated the earlier answer and added a few more things. “I read books, clean the house, pay bills - just usual stuff.”

This time he seemed slightly more satisfied. I wondered about the sudden curiosity about my day, though. He rarely asks about me because he’s usually preoccupied with his own activities, which include a number of Lego Super Mario kits that he assembles and keeps at my house.

It is important to note here that these are NOT the Lego kits of our childhood - these are extraordinary creations populated with electronic characters that react to one another and to certain spots on the extended network of castles, ships, hot air balloons, and more. Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Bowser, and others blink their eyes and respond to one another as they bounce around the key spots. Messages flash on their tummies as they traverse the small universe and engage in exciting adventures.

There had been just one problem with all this gloriousness, though, and it was a big one. We’d been struggling to figure out what to do about the Legos bricks themselves. Blake’s 18 month old brother Luke has an unfortunate tendency to put the tiny pieces in his mouth. We’d tried keeping the projects in the family room, but that was a nightmare of watching the baby like a hawk to make sure he didn’t eat them.

After much worrying and mental hand-wringing, I woke up one morning with the solution very clear in my mind. It

wasn’t optimal for me personally, but it should solve the problem quite handily.

My plan was to move the whole giant table of Lego projects into my tiny office where Blake could be assured that his little brother wouldn’t (a) get into them and destroy his hard work; or (b) swallow one and get hurt. Blake could hole up in my office, put one of those rubber door stop things under the door to keep his brother out, and play with the Legos to his heart’s content.



Blake has seemed pleased with the new arrangement. He likes the fact that his brick projects stay exactly as they were the last time he was here. He doesn’t have to worry about Luke eating them either. When I’m babysitting him, I check on him frequently and bring him snacks. He likes that too.

I wasn’t aware that he had been pondering the new arrangement until his follow-up comment came at the close of our brief question and answer session.

“You can play with my Legos when I’m not there if you want, Grandma.”

Wow. I knew this was quite an honor. He usually doesn’t want his projects disturbed, so this was a surprisingly generous offer out of the blue. I suspect it was a way for him to show his appreciation for my accommodation of his hobby, while also demonstrating concern for what must seem to him like a humdrum and lonely life his poor old grandma leads! I was very touched by the gesture.

It’s moments like these that make me realize that children can (and do) pick up on small kindnesses and try to reciprocate in ways that are meaningful to them. While it may not necessarily be an adult’s idea of a gift, it reflects the child’s interests and priorities in a way that shows he cares. That may be the best gift of all, because it’s the beginning of empathy.

I’ll be on the lookout for more precious moments like this. Maybe I’ll even take a friend’s suggestion and purchase a Lego kit for myself and ask Blake to help me put it together. By meeting him on his own turf and in his own world, we can strengthen our bond.

New Life

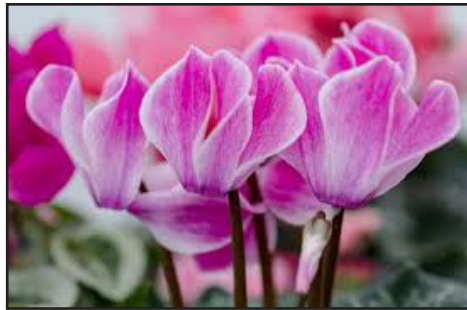
by Vivian Elaine Johnson



The cyclamen plants in the terra cotta pot on my patio stand at attention. They look alert and ready to begin a year of blooming. Nature shouts newness with each cyclamen, hyacinth, and lily that sends shoots up and out of their buried bulbs. The Easter season with the theme of new life -- both in nature and in our souls -- resonates with the idea of new experiences, new beginnings.

The cyclamen plants remind me of my younger years when I stood at attentive readiness to begin something new. I was filled with hope as energy was poured into my anticipation and planning of whatever new experience lay before me.

As we age, I wonder, do we remain open to newness of life? One of the fears of aging is a loss of purpose. An antidote to that is to be open to something new. One of my friends in her nineties recently went on a relished trip to Spain that she had earlier rejected because of her age. When asked how the trip went, she replied, "The trip went well because I acted my age." She went on to say that she learned to pace herself; she didn't have to visit fourteen historical sites. Also, she swallowed her pride and requested a wheelchair at the airport. Even though she walks just fine, she tires easily. She loved being pushed around the airport, through security, and onto the plane. Rather than feeling like an invalid, she felt like royalty. My friend was open to a new adventure, one that gave her purpose. She enjoyed it because she had wisely learned her limits.



We can be open to new experiences if we've learned to accept what is, that is, if we're realistic. An example: During the Covid pandemic many students had to take online classes, never stepping into a classroom. I'm acquainted with a college student who disliked the situation. However, since she had no power to change it, she accepted it and looked for ways to expand her interests. She surfed YouTube and found new life by learning to quilt. The result was beautiful quilt gifts to siblings, grandparents, nieces and nephews. Then, she learned the art of jewelry making, gifting her teacher mother with holiday-themed earrings to enchant her students. She didn't stop there. Sewing was next, with the result being jackets and purses.

Baking became another favorite: bagels, bread, eclairs. In spite of the Covid restrictions, her many new beginnings gave her purpose and added to her knowledge and abilities.

No matter our age, sometimes we fear that we have failed. We feel useless. There's a gap between what we wished to become and what we became. We wonder why bother to make the effort to get out of bed.

That is exactly the time to explore something new. We need to re-frame and throw out unrealistic expectations to free us from the illusion of what we once thought was the successful life. It is a time to accept our limitations, assess where we're at and what the situation is.

Are we brave enough to reach up and out of the bulb of our buried selves to seek newness of life? I know of a person who was open to new beginnings. She is a widow in her eighties who found new love. Now that's a miracle of new life.

The Black Box and the X Factor In Human Evil Behavior

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



The presence of evil in the world

The presence of evil in the world is a multifaceted conundrum. There is the theological problem, called theodicy. How can God create and allow evil to exist? Also included is how can God allow bad things to happen to good people, e.g., why do babies suffer?

A second conundrum is the propensity of human beings to do cruel and evil things. Even good people do things that could be considered “bad,” although not evil, but perhaps cruel. I have written about needing a metaphor for human inhumanity, replacing the troublesome doctrine of original sin with the theological construct of “primal sin.” This construct gives us a way to look at and explore the bad things that people do.

The history of humanity is rife with inhumane action, which was, at times, evil. Probably the best examples are slavery and the Nazi death camps during World War II. Slavery has a long and terrible history in the United States, and violence against black people has continued through the present day, including the death of George Floyd. The Nazi death camps were cruel. The prisoners were not given enough food to subsist on, yet expected to carry out hard labor.

There are many current examples of evil, including invasions and wars, hate crimes against Asians (which are increasing) and parents who mistreat their trans children.

The big question: why?

The big question is *why?* Why do humans do evil things, from slightly evil all the way to cruel and sadistic? There has been a fair amount of research on human evil. Some of the reasons given for “*why?*” are as follows:

- Abuse of power and authority
- Insecurity
- Radical beliefs
- Striving for material gain
- Loss of empathy
- Objectifying
- Denying relatedness
- Imperviousness to self-reflection
- Sadistic enjoyment consisting of adrenaline rush, feelings of dominance and control, and enjoyment in the demeaning and suffering of others

When looking at such human situations as domestic violence or violence in any relationships, the desire for power and control are major causal factors.

The Black Box and the X Factor

These reasons for evil human behavior leave us still asking *why?* Why do people abuse power and authority, and why do people derive sadistic pleasure? The answer is that there is no answer. The question of human evil goes beyond a conundrum to being inexplicable. Human evil, like human love, like God’s love and God’s grace, belong to the realm of mystery. They are inexplicable.

The *Black Box* is a good metaphor for the mystery of human evil. In science, computing and engineering, the black box is a device, system or object that gives external information that is useful, but gives no information about its inner workings. The field of psychology has adopted the black box theory, stating that there can be no scientific study of the mind because it is not observable – we have no way of knowing what is going on.

Brain studies such as the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), EEG (electroencephalogram), and PET tests (positron emission tomography) can all be helpful, but they are all artifacts of the brain, not the brain itself being observed.

We still need to look for proximate causes of human evil

We should not stop trying to understand and mitigate human evil behavior. We need to continue to better understand the abuse of power, radical thinking, etc. We must continually remind ourselves that we will find no ultimate causes. For example, we must continue to better understand hate crimes against Asians and develop strategies to reduce this racial violence. We must learn more about trans adults and children and the prejudice, abuse and violence directed towards them, along with mitigation strategies.

Not chasing down rabbit holes

The value of a black box understanding of human evil is acknowledging it as a human mystery that will forever remain an enigma. This will keep us from chasing down rabbit holes, seeking an understanding that is not possible. Rather, the time can be better spent on developing a better understanding of proximate causes and studying ways of reducing human evil.

Thank You!

Thank you to all those of you who visited our Youth Art Show! We raised \$211 for the general fund and the kids loved sharing their art projects!

- Myrna Bohan, Co-Chair of Ministry with Young People



Maunday Thursday Service



Our Maundy Thursday service on March 28 was very solemn and meaningful. Special thanks to those who stepped up to play important roles in the story, including the twelve disciples who sat around the candlelit table, Jesus, Peter, Pilate, and Caiaphas, as well as the members of the Chancel Choir who provided a musical backdrop for the drama that was unfolding. The service included communion and washing of the feet.



4/06 Lisa Bernstein
4/01 Jim Carse
4/17 David Deshler
4/19 Janice Gately
4/22 Rugee Gimarino
4/20 Linda Heath
4/15 Janice Johnson
4/22 Steve O'Dell
4/07 Paul Tellstrom
4/08 Duane Vajgrt, MD
4/30 Mark Willcox



Silverado High School
25632 Peter A. Hartman Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92691

TOILETRY ITEM DRIVE

Sponsored by IUCC Mission & Service
Serving Saddleback Valley students and their families

MOST NEEDED ITEMS:

Deodorant - Toothpaste

Shampoo – Conditioner

Shaving Cream – Razors

Paper Towel – Toilet Paper -Tissue Paper

Also acceptable:

Hand Soap – Hand Lotion – Face Cleanser – Body Wash

–Sunscreen – Feminine Hygiene Products

Toothbrush – Dental Floss

Our goal is to provide support for food-insecure & at-risk students & their families.

**Donations will be accepted beginning
Sunday, April 7th until Sunday, April 28th**

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

Monday - Thursday ~ 10 am - 4 pm

Sundays ~ Before, during and after services