

UCC News & Notes

Editor: Tricia Aynes

December 2023 | www.iucc.org | Join us on <u>Facebook</u>, <u>Instagram</u> and <u>Twitter!</u>

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

A Thanksgiving Service to Remember

It was heartwarming to celebrate IUCC's 35 years of joint Thanksgiving services with University Synagogue on November 19. We were thrilled to honor retiring Rabbi Arnold Rachlis with a loving and meaningful service!



















Not a dry eye in the sanctuary

The service included wonderful singing by the combined choirs, a "through the years" slide show of Rabbi Arnie from many past Thanksgiving services and other events, surprise appearances by former IUCC pastors Fred C Plumer and Paul Tellström, and the gift of two peace poles: one for the synagogue and one for Rabbi Rachlis.

Photos on pages 1 and 2 courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Pastor Sarah

















Getting Ready for Advent and Christmas!

Some stalwart volunteers from our women's group got together on November 30 to decorate the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas. It's starting to look very festive in there!

(Photos courtesy of Craig Tyrl)











Events in December

Snow Day & Advent Workshop on Saturday, Dec. 2 at 2:30 p.m.



Advent Workshop & Snow Play Dec 2nd

Let's get into the spirit of advent together!
All ages - crafts, family photos, hot chocolate,
and even snow play!
2:30pm - 3:30pm - Advent Workshop
3pm - 4pm - Photo Seatings
3:30pm - 4:30pm - Snow Play
Contact Tristen (Tristen@iucc.org) to learn more
or get involved!

Chancel Choir presents "Sing Noel" Concert on Sunday, Dec. 3 at 7



Sing Noel - IUCC Chancel Choir Concert

Get ready for a holiday musical extravaganza that will warm your heart! The IUCC Chancel Choir proudly presents "Sing Noel," a concert filled with the spirit of Christmas. Mark your calendars for Sunday, December 3rd, 2023, at 7pm, as the IUCC Sanctuary becomes a stage for seasonal and special choral music. Don't miss this joyful celebration of the Good News of Christmas!

Christmas Pageant on Sunday, December 17



Join us for IUCC's Christmas Pageant - Who is my Family? Performances - Sunday, December 17, at both services Parts for all ages and interests. Also a great time to volunteer!

Get in touch with Pageant Director Myrna (IUCC@iucc.org) or stop by during rehearsals on Sundays to learn more!

From the Senior Pastor

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



Rarely does the beginning of the month of December coincide with the beginning of the season of Advent. However, because Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year, we are beginning Advent much later than usual. You might say we've been shorted a week since the 4th Sunday of Advent is the same day as Christmas Eve. But on the

plus side, we were able to end Thanksgiving weekend with a special reflection on our favorite things with Pastor Craig at the pulpit and that was such a delight!

Even weeks later, I'm still feeling the high of our Thanksgiving service with the University Synagogue. It was such a joy to plot a secret celebration of Rabbi Arnie's rabbinate. I was giddy with excitement leading up to it, hoping Rabbi Arnie (or really, anyone) wouldn't catch on to the surprise until just the right moment! Pastors Fred and Paul snuck into the office and waited there until after the service began, and then they went into the quiet room where no one could see them during the service. After a touching slideshow remembering the moments of shared ministry through the years, we reflected on the beginning and how we first began this treasured relationship. Right on cue, Pastor Fred, with tissues in hand, came down the aisle as the congregation gasped at the unexpected surprise, and the two longtime friends embraced and reminisced together. Moments later, the door of the sanctuary opened again and there was Pastor Paul! It was one of those moments we got to experience with one another where the love was palpable in the room. To commemorate our friendship, IUCC gifted University Synagogue with a Peace Pole and gave one to Rabbi Arnie as well so that even upon his retirement he would see the pole of peace and remember the friendship and love we've shared all these many years. It was certainly a celebration of gratitude - the absolute perfect way to begin the week of Thanksgiving!

And so I begin December still basking in the joy and gratitude that November gifted us, looking forward in Advent anticipation to the coming of Christmas. There's so much to celebrate! I love the quiet reflection Advent invites us into along with the songs of the season that Christmas bestows upon us. I'm excited for our Advent Workshop and Snow Day on Saturday, December 2, and to begin Advent on Sunday morning and then celebrate with

our choir Sunday evening! We invited the neighborhood, so I sure hope they join us this season! Don't miss out on everything we've planned! Each week we'll light the Advent Wreath and on the third Sunday, as we light the candle of Joy, our kids will delight us once again with a modern day Christmas Pageant. Since December 24 is on a Sunday, we'll see you in the morning to light the candle of love and once again in the evening at 7pm as we celebrate Christmas Eve!

Christmas celebrates the miracle of Emmanuel - God with us. Throughout our stewardship season, we reminded ourselves that Christ is among us and we know this because we experience Christ in one another. It was so touching to see the tributes lifting up IUCCers who have been as Jesus among us, christs who share love, with generous hearts and selfless acts, present with us along our journeys. While we celebrate Jesus' birth this season, let us also give thanks that Jesus opened our eyes to God with us and let us open them once more to see the many ways God meets us, born again and again in our everyday lives. I'm so thankful for all of you and your commitment to live as Christmas Christians living giving the gift of presence, sharing your generous hearts, and bringing hope, peace, joy and love in our daily interactions. There is much to celebrate!

I hope you have many opportunities to delight in joy this season as well as quiet Advent moments of reflection. May there be gatherings with friends and family, good food and tasty desserts, and may there be time to connect with God among us: the miracle of Emmanuel. Try to resist the temptation of doing all the time, and remember that simply being is enough. It's hard sometimes with the fast pace of the season, but heed Advent's call to wait and enjoy the anticipation, relishing each moment for all its sweetness. (A reminder for myself as much as anyone else.) May it be a sacred season of hope, peace, joy and love!

In Advent anticipation,

Pastor Sarah



Snowman Square Dance & Barnyard Ball on Jan. 20



The IUCC and Fellowship Committee invite you to break free from the digital world and step into a night of pure, analog joy at our Annual Winter Party: "Snowman Square Dance and Barnyard Ball"!

Date & Time: Saturday, January 20, 2024

Time: Starting at 6:30 PM

Location: Woodbridge Village Association

Escape the virtual realm and embrace the rustic charm of our snow-kissed hoedown celebration!

Event Highlights:

- Delicious BBQ: Indulge in the warmth of delightful barbecue flavors.
- Square Dance Lessons: Kick up your heels with professional square dance callers guiding the way.
- Ticket Sales: Grab your tickets during coffee hour and secure your spot for this memorable night.
- Dress Code: No pixels, just pure charm! Feel free to express your inner cowboy or cowgirl—flannel is encouraged but entirely optional.

This isn't your typical winter party; it's a chance to unplug, unwind, and revel in the simplicity of good company and classic fun.

Mark your calendar, invite your friends, and join us for an evening where the only thing digital is the fun we're bound to have. See you at the Snowman Square Dance and Barnyard Ball! #IUCCWinterParty #SnowmanSquare-Dance #BarnyardBall

From the Moderator

by Connie Jones



Dear Church Family,

Today, I'd like to share a few personal stories.

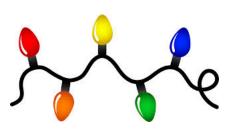
Thanksgiving weekend is the time the Jones-Cassady family traditionally drive out to Pelzer Pines in Silverado Canyon to choose our living Christmas tree. We love walking on the dirt amongst the hundreds of green, fragrant trees being grown taking turns shouting "I found one!", quickly followed by "Where are you?" In a few weeks, we'll drive out and have the tree cut down to bring home. This year, daughters Jenny and Michaelann found our special tree.

Recently, I was starting my day listening to Headspace, a meditation app. One of their exercises involved a street prayer. No matter where I am I can close my eyes, isolating and listening to each sound for a moment. Then (and this is the best part) before opening my eyes I send out the following blessing to the world:

May we all find joy
May we all be safe and healthy
May we all tap into our best selves and get to live
through that every day

Hope to see everyone at the Christmas concert this Sunday! It is the choir's gift to our wonderful congregation!

Hugs, **Connie**



Stewardship Update



Dear fellow IUCC member,

We hope you all had a great Thanksgiving spent with friends and family and that you gave thanks for all the bounty that has been bestowed upon us all. During the course of our stewardship campaign, CHRISTS AMONG US, we were reminded of so many among our congregation for whom we are thankful for how generously they have shared their time, talent, and treasure. Not least among those CHRISTS AMONG US is our treasurer, Chuck Heath, who volunteers inordinate amounts of time attending to the finances of our church.

Currently, Chuck is diligently preparing for the 2024 budget that we will approve in January during our annual congressional meeting. Making this process more difficult than it ever has been is the fact that despite all of our efforts to date, we have only raised approximately \$321,000 towards our goal of \$400,000. Last year we raised nearly \$385,000.

If we don't come somewhere close to what we raised last year, this is going to cause serious issues with regard to the church's finances. If everyone who has not yet pledged gave what they did last year, combined with pledges we have already received to date, we would make our goal. That's why it's critically important that everyone who is a member of the church make their pledge ASAP. Every pledge truly counts.

So, if you have not pledged, please do so today. You can do this online at www.iucc.org. Click the DONATE link and that will take you to a page that contains the 2024 stewardship pledge form. This is the quickest and easiest way to pledge. Alternatively, you can print out and send in the pledge form to IUCC, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, CA, 92604.

Otherwise, there are hardcopy pledge forms in the narthex and the information table that can be filled out and placed in the offering plate Sunday or handed to Pastor Sarah, Connie Jones, Bill Lawrence, Duane Vajgrt or simply turned in or mailed to the church office.

Again, this is vitally important. Otherwise, we risk possibilities of cutbacks on ministries, hiring freezes, diminishing our reserves, utilizing a line of credit, or having to pass a deficit budget once again. No one wants any of this to have to happen. Please make your pledge now.

Thank you so very much for those that have already pledged, especially those that generously increased their pledge. If it is within your ability, as many have already done, please also consider increasing your pledge. We really have to get much, much closer to our goal. Together, we can do this! We have to do this!

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Lawrence Duane Vajgrt Fund Development Committee co-chairs

Concern America's Marketplace of Fair Trade Crafts will be at:

Irvine United Congregational Church

Sunday, December 3, 2023 ~After the 9:30am & 11am services~

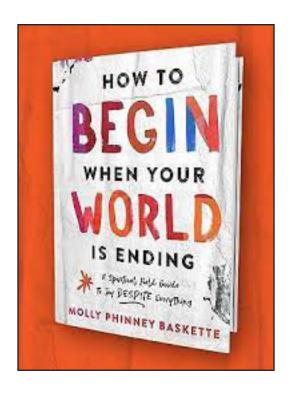
Concern America's fair trade craft program provides direct support to materially impoverished artisans and their communities in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. You get the opportunity to support them by purchasing their gorgeous hand made items.





For more information visit: www.ConcernAmerica.org

Book Clubs of Interest

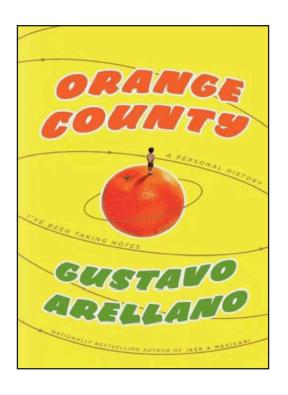




How To Begin When Your World is Ending, A Spiritual Field Guide to Joy DESPITE Everything by Molly Phinney Baskette.

Weaving together her own story of battling cancer and the stories of those she encountered in her life of faith, Baskette mines joy from all the hardest parts of being human. In doing so she reminds us that whatever you are going through, someone has been there before you, and found meaning in the madness.

This IUCC Book Club meets on Fridays this fall at 1:00 pm via Zoom. For Zoom link and more information, please contact Robinmarie McClement.



DEI Tuesday Book Club

Join us on January 9, 2024, as we begin reading and discussing <u>Orange County: A Personal History</u> by Gustavo Arellano.

Nationally bestselling author, syndicated columnist, and the voice of the Mexican-American community, Gustavo Arellano delivers the hilarious and poignant book about Orange County. This book not only weaves Gustavo's family story with the history of Orange County and the modern Mexican-immigrant experience but also offers sharp insights into a wide range of political, cultural, and social issues.

Copies of this book are on the DEI shelf in Plumer Hall.

Orange County: A Personal History https://a.co/d/dkq2swd



It is that time to donate poinsettias for your loved ones past and present. Help support the Advent season with a special dedication. The plant is yours to take after Christmas Eve service. Make your dedication on the patio between services. Thank you!



Lisa Bohan 12/23 WilliamBonney 12/27 Bill Dietrich 12/11 Tommie Kozlov 12/11 Shanthi Nataraj 12/30 Jessica Neilson 12/17 Craig Repp 12/28 Mary Repp 12/11 Pat Sauter 12/29 Pat Sutcliff 12/26



Comma Groups are Going Strong!

We are happy to report that our Comma Groups are going strong! Here are photos of just two of them (send us yours, and it will be printed in the newsletter too). Over 80 people signed up for these monthly small group gettogethers that encourage fun and friendship.

Comma Groups are a vital part of how IUCC members connect as a community. Groups meet once a month from October through April for food, fellowship, and supportive conversation.





Ministry With Young People: Sunday School

Photos & Captions courtesy of Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP, and Tristan Reineccius

For November, we learned how to practice stewardship, gratitude, mindful preparation, and friendship!

Here's us helping at coffee hour and making hospitality caterpillars to learn one way there are "Christs Among Us"!

Thank you to the many MYP adults for helping us with food and learning to be awesome hosts!











Eliza Wall's Ballet Show: Clara's Dream - family friendly ballet performance of the Nutcracker featuring one of our very own MYPers! December 15 at 7pm, Dec. 16 at 3:30pm and 7pm, and Dec. 17 at 3:30pm.

http://www.pacifictheatreballet.com/tickets.html



Young Adult Friendsgiving Event on Nov. 26 (photo courtesy of Dustin Nguyen)



Gifts

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



A surprise Gift:

She watched the couple as they walked into the Jersey Mike Sub shop. The small elderly woman's silver hair shone in the sun that streamed through the window. She held the hand of the tall man by her side who had a cane in his other hand to steady his walk. They paused in front of the menu board

high on the wall and discussed what they would order. Their affection was obvious. He was solicitous of her as she smiled up at him. The onlooker felt a twinge in her heart; the couple reminded her of her parents who died long ago. She listened as the couple ordered sandwiches and then she left.

The man carefully maneuvered his cane as they made their way to the checkout counter. Then his petite partner held it for him as he reached into his pocket for his wallet. He reached out and handed his credit card to the clerk. She shook her head and said, "There's no charge. Your food is already paid for."

Puzzled, the elderly couple looked at each other and then at the clerk. "The woman ahead of you paid for your food," she said. The couple looked around and saw no woman, only men waiting to order. The clerk shook her head when they asked who it was. "I have no idea. She paid and left."

Bewildered but appreciative, the couple balanced the food and helped each other out the door to sit at a table in the sun. As they munched on their sandwiches, they talked about the surprise gift. Who would be so kind? The warmth in their hearts for their secret gift-giver matched the warmth of the afternoon sun. They looked at each other and smiled.

A Gift to Re-Gift:

No matter how you looked at it, it was an unusual gift.

Her husband sat in his favorite stuffed chair and watched her open a gift that was clumsily wrapped in used rumpled paper. "I wrapped it myself," he said in a raspy thin voice.

Though his eyes lacked expression, a small smile suggested that he felt pleased with himself as she pulled out a

wooden pull-toy in the shape of a bunny. It was clearly meant for a toddler.

"Oh-h-h, I like it. It's cute," she smiled and nodded. "Thank you, sweetheart." She held up the bunny and looked at her gift-giver with kind eyes. "How nice of you to buy me a Christmas present." He looked straight ahead.

Tears formed in her eyes as she went to her husband and bent down to kiss his forehead. She thanked God for this man of hers who, even through the fog of Alzheimer's, remembered her with a gift this Christmas.

He died in a few months. The bunny pull-toy sat on the coffee table reminding her of her husband's last Christmas. The next year she gave it as a gift from him to their first great grandchild. It was a gift that kept on giving.

A Precious Gift:

Becky came from a family that had very few resources. Every morning she ate the free breakfast at her school. For lunch she always brought a brown paper bag with one slice of bread with a thin layer of peanut butter. One morning after breakfast, she approached her teacher's desk and said, "I brought you a present, teacher." She shyly held out a plastic bag that Miss Smith recognized as the one provided to hold the plastic breakfast utensils. Inside the bag were mini marshmallows usually found in the breakfast cereal.

Becky stood next to the teacher's desk with one foot perched on top of the other and said, "I hope you like it." Miss Smith's throat pinched as she realized that Becky had carefully picked out the tiny marshmallows from her cereal and saved them for her.

"I like it," she assured Becky with a soft pat on her shoulder.

"Good, 'cuz I love you, teacher." She happily skipped back to her desk not noticing that Miss Smith pulled out a tissue from her pocket and wiped her eyes.

Becky knew she gave a precious gift – mini marshmallows, her very favorite part of breakfast.

But what about you?

A reflection on the "Christs Among Us" video series

by Tricia Aynes

Thank you.



I thought about doing a video to nominate someone for the "Christs Among Us" series during the stewardship campaign, but I had some real mixed emotions about it. I was surprised at how much cognitive dissonance I experienced. Maybe you did too.

On the one hand, I found myself nodding and smiling as I watched each new video. I knew each of the "Christs" personally, and I agreed wholeheartedly that they were very deserving of the shout out. I was especially fascinated that so many videos focused on personal acts of kindness rather than on more widespread ones. It was eye-opening

to realize that one-to-one interactions could be more impactful and long-lasting than generalized good works. In story after story, a simple act of thoughtfulness made an indelible mark. I was delighted that people who didn't usually get their place in the sun were getting an opportunity to shine.

I liked the video idea in principal – who wouldn't? I have long believed that we don't do nearly enough to acknowledge the many warm-hearted and generous people here at IUCC. I have had discussions with some of you about how we can do a better job of thanking those who do so much. I fear that our failure to do so can cause real gems to feel wrung out like a sponge over time. We burn them out and they slip away, only to reappear somewhere else where they feel more appreciated.

So if I believe that honoring fine people is a good thing (and I do), what about this video thing was bothering me? Well, for one thing, I got hung up on that fact that there are a lot of people at IUCC who qualify as Christs Among Us—so many big-hearted souls who give generously of their time and talents in ways both big and small. We have many truly lovely people here who labor quietly and faithfully in the trenches.

From what I can see, most IUCCers are doing the best they can given their time, skills, health, family, and other commitments. So how do we go about choosing one person to honor over another? How many are sitting in the pews wondering – what about me?

I worry that there is a danger in singling out just a few for acknowledgement. In praising one, do we inadvertently leave ten (or twenty or thirty) others feeling left out? While it feels good for those chosen, it can feel like a letdown for those not so lucky. While I don't believe that people do good deeds for the praise or the glory (mostly they're just trying to be decent human beings and help others), it seems a pity that we can't put our heads together and find a way to include everyone and make them feel special and appreciated.

There is no doubt that the "Christs Among Us" videos were beautiful and heartfelt. I was thrilled to be mentioned in one of them (thanks, Alex!). It made me feel special. But I've been worrying about the rest of the deserving people

who weren't mentioned. So this is for you, my friends:

THANK YOU. Thank you for what you have done and continue to do, both at IUCC and in the wider community: for your acts of quiet courage; for your social activism; for your loving care of immigrant families; for leading our ministries with

grace and devotion; for teaching adults and children about spirituality; for your patience with elderly relatives and crying grandchildren; for providing a safe and loving haven for our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters; for leading comma groups and book clubs; for keeping our church's accounts in order; for knitting prayer shawls; for providing a shoulder to cry on; for serving as a deacon; for singing in the choir; for opening up your home for church parties; and for the million and one other things you do. I'm not going to name names, but you know who you are.

THANK YOU. Thank you for showing up on Sunday mornings even when you're tired and your joints ache. Thank you for praying for the sick and the bereaved. Thank you for warm greetings and great hugs. Thank you for putting up with the rest of us. Thank you for being part of our faith community. Thank you for answering the call with "Here I am, Lord. Send me."

Even if you weren't singled out, that doesn't mean you're not loved and appreciated. You are. I see you, and others do too. THANK YOU to ALL the Christs Among Us.

Drag Has Come to IUCC

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



We have had two drag queen bingo nights and Cucu Chanel has been reading to our children. At the bingo nights we have been delighted by drag performances, with lively singing, lip syncing, and dancing. Feminine qualities are often exaggerated. Costuming has been elaborate and the makeup has been stunning.

Most of us know very little about drag, even though it has come to IUCC. Drag is a performance art form that probably dates back to the period of ancient Greek drama, and perhaps even before that. Women were not allowed to go on stage or become actors, so men, acting as females, played the roles of women. In the United Kingdom, Lady J., a drag performer with a doctorate in musicology, focused on drag history, tracing its inception back to 1860s Victorian England, when Ernest Boulton of the duo Boulton and Park described his cross-dressing as "drag" - the first known use of the term.

Drag performances usually involve elaborate costuming and makeup. It can take a drag queen several hours to get ready for a performance. Dancing and singing, or lip syncing, are usually involved. Men dressed and acting as women are called drag queens and women dressing and acting as men are called drag kings. Trans men who dress like women are sometime sometimes called trans queens.

Drag has long been associated with the LGBTQIA + community. Drag shows typically occur at LGBTQIA + pride

parades, drag pageants, cabarets, carnivals and nightclubs. Of course, drag queens can perform in venues outside of the LGBTQ IA+ community too.

Minstrel shows and vaudeville have had a significant influence on drag shows. Women were not allowed, for the most part, to participate in minstrel shows and vaudeville performances.

Drag shows are a significant part of American history, with black men playing an important role. New York's black Harlem is thought to be the birthplace of drag, with black men dressing and acting like women. The first self-declared drag queen in America was William Dorsey Swann. Born a slave in Hancock, Maryland in the 1880s, he started hosting drag balls in Washington DC. They were attended by other men who were former slaves.

The most famous drag queen is RuPaul. Uniquely, as an actor and musician, he was able to turn being a drag queen into a successful career. He was successful in mainstream media. He started drag races, a contest selecting the best drag queen. Drag races are popular today and are held all over the world. Another famous drag queen was Pablo Vitar, a Brazilian singer and performer.

Drag is a worldwide phenomenon, existing and such countries as The United Kingdom, South Africa, Thailand, Philippines, Canada and India, as well as in the United States. In the United Kingdom, gay men would dress up as women and go to Molly clubs, which were taverns and coffee houses.

Drag has come to IUCC, enriching our lives. I want to say a word about Pastor Sarah's courage in supporting our drag bingo nights, and especially Cucu Chanel reading to our children. Drag has long been associated with the LGBTQIA + community, and there is an unfounded fear that queer people will corrupt the gender thinking of children. Kudos to Pastor Sarah for debunking this awful stereotype. We are blessed to have a robust LGBTQIA+ community at IUCC, enriching our church life. Diversity and inclusion at IUCC is our most special quality.

Next month we will have an article on the life of a drag queen, featuring Cucu Chanel. It will be a great article because of her self-revealing honesty.