

February 2023 | www.iucc.org | Join us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)!

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

There's No Business Like SNOW Business!

IUCC members and friends had a rollicking good time at our Winter Party on January 21!



Heartfelt thanks to event chair Craig Tyrl and his great committee (shown above) for making it such fun!



More Photos of the Winter Party

Photos on pages 1 and 2 courtesy of Tricia Aynes, Pastor Sarah, and Glenda Wyant



From the Senior Pastor

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



With one month of 2023 under our belt, we have an opportunity to pause and reflect upon the beginning of our year. Did you make a resolution? Do you still have the resolve you did a month ago? Are you done with the year already, or looking forward to how it will continue to unfold?

As I reflect on our first month together, again I'm amazed at how active we are at IUCC. What a joy it was to begin the year with Jerri Davenport leading our service on New Year's Day. We expanded that joy when she and Richard officially joined the church as members as we capped off the month on January 29, when they joined with a few other wonderful people! I shared my love of Epiphany celebrations around the world as we observed our Star Words tradition of letting the word guide us through our year. The music for MLK Sunday was powerful as we let Dr. King's own words from the Birmingham jail speak to us, demanding us to look at our world today and the roles we play, particularly as we seek to be the Christians he needed then and our world needs now. What a fun gathering at the Winter Party! When the festivities began on Saturday the 22nd, the spirit of joy that exuded from the gathering room at Woodbridge Community Center could be felt by everyone present! I'm so grateful to everyone who came together to pull off such a fun evening that fostered real connection as friendships were made or deepened and music filled the air!

I was moved when I saw all of the volunteers come to the altar to celebrate our Preschool Refresh, recognizing the incredible gift that each gave to forge us through to the completion of Phase 1! It was joyful to join with our preschool director, Irma Rosales, childcare committee chair, Linda Heath, and moderator, Tricia Aynes, to cut the ribbon and invite everyone in to see the progress made by our dedicated volunteers. I am so humbled by the commitment of our lead volunteers and really excited to see how phase 2 unfolds. Thank you to everyone who volunteered and to those who have already contributed to the next phase. It will definitely be the more expensive part of the Refresh as cabinets and flooring aren't cheap – but I hope that now that you've seen what we can do when we come together with a can-do spirit, perhaps you'll help us get there! Every little bit gets us closer!

And of course, we ended the month with our annual meeting and with it a commitment to continue to do and be church as those called out to serve and share, to seek justice and create peace, to comfort the hurting, cloth the naked, and love the outcast. The day was made even more exciting as new members joined the family!

Even as February is the shortest month, it promises to be just as packed! So if your resolution was to engage with your church family – we'll give you plenty of opportunities!

You may have heard by now that we're trying something new! On the first Sunday in February, not only will we be celebrating Evolution Sunday - a day where we uplift science and faith - with Dr. Adolfo Sequira from the UCI Brain Lab, but we'll also begin two different styles of worship. First service will look more familiar with a few traditions brought back in, while second service will have a different feel. Feel free to check out the sermon I preached on January 22nd to the second service about the changes (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESZIXGUvVkQ>).

It will begin at 11:15 a.m. and may have a more contemporary feel with instruments like a guitar and regular use of percussion. The chancel choir will be featured in first service, while second service will have more congregational singing. This service will likely evolve as we continue to listen for God's creative spirit among us so feel free to join us as we explore together. One thing we can promise you is that while there will be two different services, we will always be one church with a commitment to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly in love and joy together on our journeys.

With February also comes Scout Sunday and an opportunity to celebrate our commitment to a new troop. We'll celebrate Fat Sunday together – so don't forget your beads come February 19th and be sure to stay for Kings Cake! Ash Wednesday will be on February 22nd with a reflective service here at 7 p.m. and an opportunity to receive drive-thru ashes from 4-5:30 p.m. Then the final Sunday in February is the first Sunday of Lent, so join us as we begin our journey to the cross.

I'm looking forward to the new opportunities February brings us as we continue to walk faithfully together, serving our God and one another as we live with joy and share in love.

Yours along the journey,

Pastor Sarah

Photos from ECC "Refresh" Ribbon-Cutting Event on January 22

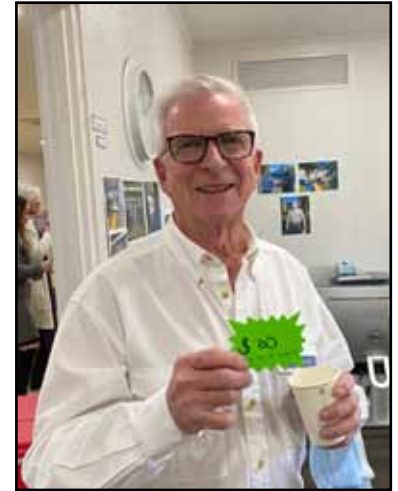
Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes, Jim Aynes, & Karolyn Fencil



Stalwart volunteer Mark Willcox contributed countless hours of labor to make the project such a success!



Pastor Sarah is already raising money for Phase 2 of the Preschool Refresh Project, which will pay for new flooring and cabinets. Members were encouraged to select a piece of the project and donate towards it.



Loyal volunteer Paul Feick spent a ton of time on the project contributing his many skills!



Ribbon-cutters were (L to R) Pastor Sarah, Preschool Director Irma Rosales, Child Care Committee Chair Linda Heath, and Moderator Tricia Aynes. Pastor Sarah praised all the wonderful volunteers who participated in the refresh project.



More Photos from ECC "Refresh" Ribbon-Cutting Event

There were lots of IUCC folks on hand to watch the ribbon-cutting, eat some cake, and tour the refreshed preschool. Everyone was very impressed with all the improvements that had been made. It looks so clean, modern, and bright now!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes, Jim Aynes, & Karolyn Fencil



From the Administrative Pastor

by Craig Tyrl



Dear Congregation!

It is hard to believe that my first month on the job is complete. I wanted to report back the first impressions, the challenges, and the day-to-day experiences of being your new administrative pastor. I'm blessed and happy to share some reflections.

First, the work is joyous and satisfying. Throughout a normal day, I have constant interactions with members in need of answers, conversation, feedback, guidance, and support. My first Tuesday, Ken Wyant walked me through the needs of the Tuesday Bible study. Steve Goetz shared the process of collections for Mission and & Service. Susan Sayre dropped by to support the flooring drive at the ECC. The incredible ECC staff are no longer strangers but friends and collaborators. I've come to know Paul Strasma through his instrumental leadership in bringing Boy Scouts back to IUCC. The list goes on. Suffice it to say, a day on the job brings constant interpersonal contact, deepening my connection with each of you. This is the part I treasure most.

Although challenging, I'm grasping the responsibilities of the job quickly. My work as a theater administrator gives me the appropriate skillset, and nothing that has come my way is outside my expertise. At this point, I have executed contracts, purchased inventory, managed a congregational meeting, updated databases, managed the email blasts, unplugged a toilet, secured bids for a security camera system, organized calendars, coordinated schedules, posted on social media, and prepared all the needs for Sunday worship. My biggest frustration is overlooking a typo or calendar error. For those that catch my mistakes, please know the goal is zero, and I do appreciate the feedback.

I hope my creativity balances the occasional mistake. The position allows for so much creativity and imagination. I particularly enjoy the email blasts. I don't get much feedback, but I hope you are enjoying the member spotlight, graphics, crossword, and links to relevant activities for our progressive community. Pastor Sarah and I brainstorm regularly on ways to enhance worship and engage our congregation in the fullest of ways. Drag Queen Bingo is at the top of my list of what's to come.

Finally, my first month is also a crash course in sausage making. My backstage pass highlights all our challenges and successes. As I experience the fullness of our community, my eagerness to help and serve grows stronger. It's a privilege to know you and this church!

Warmly,
Craig Tyrl

Hospitality

by Alex Ingal



Make 2023 the year you volunteer to assist with coffee hour. Coffee hour will happen without you, but WITH you it could be much easier, and with more variety of snacks.

Even if you are not ready to commit, please take time to visit <https://iucc.org/coffee-hour/> and read about the different ways you can assist in the future. I turn 33 on February 24th so any assistance on the 26th would mean less work for me!

J. Alex Ingal
Hospitality Chair

My Thoughts on Green Faith

by Kathi Smith



As we approach the season of Lent, I would like us to give serious consideration to giving up beef. Beef production, which increases greenhouse and noxious gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, carbon dioxide, ammonia, and hydrogen sulfide, is a major contributor to climate change. As the demand for beef increases globally, land use changes result in the destruction of forests and rainforests. Forty percent of our world's grain is fed to livestock. The amount of water required to raise one pound of beef (1,800 gallons) is staggering. Livestock in the U.S. produce 396 tons of excrement every year. I encourage you to do a bit of research yourself to learn more about the impact of beef production on our planet and its inhabitants.

Calling All Collaborators!

by Alex Ingal

The Communications team is excited to announce that, in March, we will be working on designing a streamlined version of the IUCC website to mirror current style expectations. We are looking for those who have creative ideas or input. If you have seen a website that you like the looks of (or even a specific page) please share it with us so we can use it as a reference when planning the new website layout.



In addition, if there are pages/content that don't exist now but would be good to include on our new website, we would like to hear about those too. As there are over 100 pages currently attached to the IUCC website, if there is a 'hidden' page that has useful information on it (example, how to crochet hearts), send us that IUCC URL so we can make sure that information makes the move to the new platform style. If you have specific questions or concerns about the new website design/layout/content, please write them down and wait to ask them until March as the answer will be very vague right now until we actually start working on the design/layout/content.

Thank you for your assistance!
J. Alex Ingal, Communications Co- Chair



The Mexican tradition of Rosca de Reyes holds that on Epiphany Sunday (Three Kings Day), a small plastic baby representing Jesus is baked into the bread. In keeping with this tradition, Hospitality Chair Alex Ingal baked delicious pastries with a small number of little plastic "babies" hidden inside. Here's Alex with Moderator Tricia, who found one of the hidden babies after second service (and might have swallowed it if not for Alex's quick intervention!).

- Photo courtesy of Pastor Sarah

A Message from Our Conference



A Message from the Southern California Nevada Conference (SCNC) Board Chair and Staff

On Sunday morning we awoke to news of a mass shooting in Monterey Park at a dance studio near a Lunar New Year party. The Lunar New Year is a central celebration for Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities.

And then more news came our way. Two more mass shootings in Half Moon Bay and Oakland, and another random shooting in Yakima, Washington. These horrific acts of violence shatter each community, and leave us with more questions than answers.

As our hearts break for this senseless and preventable loss of life, may our elected leaders, faith leaders, churches, and communities commit to ending gun violence to create a more just world for all.



| | | | |
|------|------------------|------|---------------------|
| 2/06 | Jim Aynes | 2/13 | Kaytee Macdonald |
| 2/22 | Iris Bjorklund | 2/25 | Brian McComb |
| 2/28 | John Emerson | 2/23 | Kris Miaco |
| 2/03 | Annika Evensen | 2/02 | Donna Picard |
| 2/02 | Harley Gimmarino | 2/04 | Elizabeth Rodriguez |
| 2/10 | Greg Guth | 2/03 | Matthew Ruiz |
| 2/21 | Jim Hamilton | 2/15 | Peggy Stalter |
| 2/24 | Alex Ingal | | |

Fund Development



Dear fellow congregants,

The IUCC Fund Development Committee wishes to thank everyone who supported our 2023 pledge campaign as well as those who also provided an end-of-year donation. A special thank you goes out to those who did both. Our pledge campaign achieved approximately \$385,000 towards our \$400,000 goal. The gracious end-of-year donations added an additional \$10,000 to help bridge the gap. We are truly thankful for all of those who are helping to sustain the financial viability of IUCC through their pledges and donations that will help our church BE THE CHANGE for the future.

The Fund Development Committee has attempted to send a personal handwritten thank-you note to all of those who pledged and contributed to the end-of-year donations. If somehow we inadvertently overlooked someone, please accept our apologies, but again, know how appreciative we are for your support. We wish to also thank those who contribute financially throughout the year with their offerings at church services as well as those who offer their volunteer hours throughout the year. It all contributes to making us financially whole.

Most gratefully,

The IUCC Fund Development committee comprised of Linda Haghi, Cesar Sangalang, Glenna Matthews, Tricia Aynes, Renae Boyum, Chuck Heath, and Pastor Sarah with Connie Jones and Duane Vajgrt as co-chairs

be the
change

Welcome to our New Members who joined January 29th!

Photos courtesy of Keith Boyum & Tricia Aynes



Richard Davenport



Jerri Davenport



Amir Jibod



Cheri Miller



Ed Ruppert



Ed's wife Kimberly Ruppert and their daughter River, who joined back on October 9



Remembering Tom Silk

by Renae Boyum, Membership Chair



I first interacted with Tom when he agreed to serve on the Fund Development Committee back around 2001. His keen insights and caring about our church certainly manifested themselves in that arena. He loved the music of the Chancel Choir and was a faithful almost "front row sitter" on the pulpit side of the church. He usually sat with Reefa Hannenberger and always, always gave me a big hug after the service. He was interested in my family, in particular our son Andy, and when Andy was in church he greeted him in the most kind and generous way. (Maybe that was because he also has a son named Andrew?!)

He ran a very successful antiques business for many years -- Steven Thomas Antiques -- and traveled to Europe often looking for finds for his store. He and I talked about his travels to Italy and we talked about our shared Italian heritage. Tom was a good friend to me when I had my kidney removed 16 years ago and his friendship continued through the years, even as he suffered his own health challenges. In short, he made a difference in my life, in the life of IUCC, and the many people whose lives he touched.

- **Renae Boyum**

(Tom passed away on January 15, 2023 and is survived by his two children. A memorial service is being planned for early June at IUCC.)

Tom was a loyal and devoted volunteer with Friends of Orange County Detainees, visiting his detainee regularly and faithfully. When his detainee was released, Tom was over the moon with joy. Tom was a valued and dependable member of this much-needed program.

- **Tricia Aynes**

From the Moderator

by *Tricia Aynes*



\$35,268 Grant for Preschool

I am so pleased to announce that IUCC has received a conditional grant from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Child Care and Development Division (CCDD) in the amount of \$35,268 to be used for the following items in our preschool: HVAC System; Security Upgrades; Air Purifiers; and Generator. You may recall that we submitted our proposal for this grant back in March 2022, so we've waited a long time for the decision.

Winter Congregational Meeting

Thank you, IUCC family! It was such a joy to see so many of your beautiful faces at Sunday's Winter Congregational Meeting on Zoom. While we had to wait a bit to reach our quorum of 75 members, we eventually got there! Thank you for your patience, your support and your attendance.

While I wish we could have gathered in person, it seemed prudent to do this meeting entirely online. As always, our aim is to get the work of the church done while adhering to busy schedules and keeping everyone healthy.

Thank Yous

There's always a risk involved when thanking folks by name - I worry that I'll slip up and forget someone important! If I mess up, please forgive me. Please know that I value and appreciate all of you, and I'm well aware that there are many wonderful "unsung heroes" quietly serving amongst us! That being said, I hope you won't mind some special "shout outs" to a few folks who have gone well above and beyond the call of duty this past month.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to stellar human being **Chuck Heath**, who stepped boldly into the role of IUCC Treasurer in December 2021, taking the reins of an extremely complex and difficult job. He did so with grace and generosity of spirit, spending countless hours to master the intricacies of the job. Most recently, Chuck creating a clear, concise, and easy-to-understand PowerPoint presentation of the 2023 budget for our consideration. The man is a real blessing to IUCC and to all of us who have the privilege of working with him.

Heartfelt appreciation goes out to the amazing **Craig Tyrll**, who has been such a champ in more ways than I can count. Of course, there's the obvious: he stepped into the role of Administrative Pastor like he was born to the job. His ability to multi-task (and do it all well!) has been a beautiful thing to behold. Most recently, Craig speakheaded the Winter Party on January 21, and he and his committee did a wonderful job creating a memorable event. Kudos to all of them for a really well planned and enjoyable evening!

The entertainment provided by **Chris Peterson** and **members of the choir** was especially fabulous! Thanks to **everyone who bought tickets** too - your support helped make it a fun night for all.

Appreciation also goes to **Pastor Sarah**, who continues to bring her usual zest and enthusiasm to every project she undertakes. She is a true visionary as she leads our congregation through many challenges. Most recently, she had the idea of giving our preschool a "refresh" and she set about convincing others that this was the right thing to do to stimulate enrollment. Her excitement was contagious, and the project was underway!

I am so grateful for the countless hours of love and effort put in by all who participated in the "refresh" project, but especially to super stars **Mark Willcox, Heidi Willcox, Paul Feick, and Tom Mason**. They worked many nights, weekends, and vacation times to update our school to make it a more happy, inviting, and welcoming place. What a transformation! I am blown away by how bright, clean, and cheerful it looks. If you didn't get a chance to see it during the recent ribbon-cutting ceremony, you missed something special. It positively glows! (*See photos in this newsletter.*) First impressions matter, and now the place gives a wonderful first impression to prospective families.

A thousand thanks to the amazing **Alex Ingal** for all the effort and enthusiasm he brings to baking us delicious treats every Sunday. If that wasn't enough, he is preparing to embark on designing a new website for our preschool!

And speaking of loyal volunteers, I am so impressed by the dependability and hard work put in by our two sound guys, **Donnie Mineo** and **Bobby Blue**, who show up every Sunday to ensure that our services run smoothly. Thank you!

This is just a start on the many thanks owed to our wonderful members. I could go on and on! With the help and support of all of you, we can bring about real change in our community and make IUCC a hub for Progressive Christianity in Southern California and beyond.

Tricia

Ministry With Young People

Photos and article by Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP

For Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, the older kids pondered “positive” versus “negative” peace. The younger kids (and teen volunteers) enacted Dr. Seuss’s story of *The Sneetches*!



Ms. Martha reads the story of *The Sneetches* for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.



Learning about Positive Versus Negative Peace with Ms. Sandy!



Left: Acting as Snooty Starred Sneetches & Snubbing the No Star Sneetches



Right: Acting as the trickster, Mr. McBean



Role Play - Enacting the story of the Sneetches with star on/star off machines



Three Young Wise Ones in crowns for Three Kings Day! We continued our tradition of drawing a word to guide the coming year! Draw one any time here:

<https://iucc.org/star>

Ministry With Young People (continued)

Photos and article by Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP



Kids & Youth - Join us for Sunday School!

MYP will be offering Sunday School during BOTH services (9:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.) starting Feb 5th alongside IUCC's Refreshed Second Service!

A sampling of what's to come -

February 5 - Evolution Sunday: We'll learn about change and God's role!

February 12 - Love + Scout Sunday: Younger class will learn how we love and care about others - families, friends, community, environment, & beyond. Older class will learn about Jesus' lesson on anger and love. Both will include valentine crafts.

MYP will host a Soup-er Bowl Donation Drive (bring cans of soup) - see info at left below Scout Sunday - IUCC will be honoring scouts this Sunday.

February 19 - Fat Sunday: Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday, and other festivities. Older kids to learn about the Road to Emmaus. Pizzelles might be on the menu!

Save the Date - April 2nd Palm Sunday and April 9th Easter

TACKLE **SOUPER BOWL** OF CARING HUNGER

IUCC Youth
are hosting a Soup Drive on
Superbowl Sunday!
Sunday, February 12th, 2023

Please bring cans of soup and help us
"Tackle" hunger in our community!



Baptism Sunday & Lunar New Year

On Baptism Sunday, we learned about baptism as a special kind of announcement and the role community support can play. We also learned about Lunar New Year! Here's us during craft time!

Crème de Menthe Cake

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



Hello Church!

I'm taking February off in terms of writing this column. However, I can't resist giving you the following recipe. It's the bomb, as the kids say. My neighbor in Minnesota made it and my family devoured it.

Crème de Menthe Cake

- 1 package white cake mix (If you're ambitious, use your own white cake recipe)
- 3 Tablespoons crème de menthe (Try to refrain from taking nips as you cook)
- 1 can or jar of Hershey's Fudge Topping (Note: Fudge, not just chocolate sauce)
- 1 container Cool Whip, 13 ½ ounces (or whipping cream)
- 1 Tablespoon crème de Menthe

- Mix cake, adding the 3 tablespoons crème de menthe.
- Bake in a 9 X 13 pan at 350 degrees for 35-40 minutes until toothpick comes out clean. (Cake mix will tell you the degrees and time. I'm just guessing.)
- Cool cake on counter (keep pets and children away).
- Spread fudge over cake.
- Combine Cool Whip with 1 tablespoon crème de menthe and spread it over fudge. I suppose you could add nuts somewhere in this if you want.

Chill (both you and the cake) before serving. Delish!



Mission & Service Ministry

by Steve Goetz



Thank you, Thank you, Thank you !!!!

During the past three weeks, IUCC members' generous outreach to our unsheltered neighbors and to the Afghan refugee community has really been off the charts. Here's what has happened:

- We have delivered three large loads of jackets, coats, sweaters, socks, and rain gear to Housing is a Human Right of Orange County. Hundreds of items of cold weather wear that literally will save lives!
- Seven of these jackets went directly to two newly-arrived Afghan refugee families having minimal clothing.
- We received some very generous donations for our Emergency Refugee Fund which will go directly to those nine Afghan families we serve who have the greatest immediate need.
- One of the nine refugee families lost their father to a massive heart only three weeks ago. Thankfully, his daughter, after an interview at Orange Coast College, was offered part-time work on the campus.
- One of our young refugees has been enrolled in a local high school. A volunteer from your Mission and Service Ministry has been tutoring this teen.
- Other members of the Ministry have volunteered to drive the refugee families, most of whom have no personal transportation, to medical appointments, to prayers at the Islamic Center, or to shopping.

Your generosity has been so sincerely good-hearted. And as Pastor Sarah emphasized in a recent sermon, IUCC is not a building or a service, it is the people. Your actions on behalf of those less fortunate becomes your prayer.

Gratefully,
Your Mission and Service Ministry

Religion vs. Spirituality

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi, Adult Education Ministry and Diversity & Inclusion Ministry



A survey was administered by the Southern California-Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (SCNCUCC). The majority of people who took the survey revealed that most people identified themselves as spiritual rather than religious. Religion, as a general rule, is about what we

believe and why we believe it.

In my experience I have learned that religion is mechanical, in that it is about a particular tradition, the institution, and the system. Religion gives us creeds and dogmas as well as definitions of God. Spirituality, on the other hand, is more about seeking nourishment for the human heart and, as such, leads one to seek not just a way to exist but rather the reason to exist beyond tradition and beyond the biological and institutional.

One can be religious and yet lack spiritual depth. There are many ordained clergy that I have met in the last few years who are theologically well trained and knowledgeable about religious processes within a given faith tradition and are sadly spiritually anemic. Just because someone wears a collar does not make the person spiritually grounded. Spirituality is not a linear process, but rather a process that can only be described as, "I walk, I fall, I get up; I walk, I fall, I get up; I walk, I fall, I get up; again and again and again..." Therefore, spirituality is a journey without a clear destination whereas religion is a clear destination without a journey.

A spiritual person, in my view, is one who is led and lives a reality of questions, some of which are unanswerable. A religious person, on the other hand, lives in a realm of answers. Naturally, there is definitely a link between religion and spirituality, but in my experience they are not the same. In fact, the late Bishop John Shelby Spong asserts that "God is not a Christian, God is not a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist. All of those are human systems which human beings have created to try to help us walk into the mystery of God. I honor my tradition, I walk through my tradition, but I don't think my tradition defines God, I think it only points me to God."

Religion gives one commandments and in many ways can lead to transactional experiences whereas spirituality is expressed in everything we do. Spirituality begins where religion ends and in my experience, I have found religion to be a sham at its worse and yet at its best—which rarely occurs—anchors me to the best that I can be of myself as long as I keep in mind that religion is mechanically theoretical. Spirituality is organically fluid and not well defined because spiritual experiences, like mystical experiences, are neither transferable nor explainable. For me, religion is the belief of someone else's experience, whereas spirituality is having my own experience. In my discernment about religion vs. spirituality, I have discovered six important principles:

1. There are no rules in spirituality.
2. Spirituality is based only on love not fear.
3. Religion proclaims truth and spirituality allows one to discover it.
4. Religion separates but spirituality unites.
5. There is a difference between karma (spirituality) and punishment (religion).
6. Spirituality allows one to walk one's own path.

As you think about religion vs. spirituality, where do you find yourself in your life journey?



The Dynamics of Faith

by *The Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge*
Member, Diversity & Inclusion Ministry and Member,
Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry



This article includes ideas from Paul Tillich's book, *The Dynamics of Faith*, and existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard.

The Many Facets of faith

Faith takes many forms. We can have faith in a person, an institution like the stock market, or in God and Jesus. There is a built-in confusion between "faith" and "belief" because at times we use the words interchangeably. Regarding our faith in God, we can say that we "believe" certain things about God. In this context "belief" really means an element of "faith."

Faith involves the whole person

Tillich points out that faith involves the whole person. Jesus' great commandment is to love our God with all our heart, soul and mind. Faith includes both the mind and the heart. The faith of some fundamentalist Christians can focus more on heart than mind, making them more comfortable with absolute truths.

A dynamic faith requires both heart and mind, an intellectual assent and a commitment that results in passionate action. In order to be authentic, faith must include both thought and emotion. Intellectual consent and passionate commitment, along with the intent to search for truth, are the hallmarks of Progressive Christianity.

Faith includes doubt

Some people think that faith must be one-hundred per cent, with no doubt. To the contrary, faith includes doubt. Faith is in spite of doubt. Faith is a constant, ongoing struggle with doubt. Doubt helps us to firm up what we believe. We continually growth in faith in the struggle with doubt. Doubt is necessary for spiritual growth.

The difference between belief and faith

Belief involves something concrete or specific that we hold to be true, for which there is some evidence. Fundamentalist Christians believe in the Bible, a concrete object they can see and touch. Most of them consider the Bible to be the absolute word of God, with every word being literally true. Questions reflecting doubt are discouraged. There's a literal understanding of the virgin birth and Jesus' resurrection.

In contrast, many Progressive Christians see the virgin birth and Jesus' resurrection as metaphors, which are much more powerful than any event in history. Progressive Christians believe that faith is open - that the struggle is in the continual search for truth, wherever it leads. Faith is much different than belief, because it not only accepts but embraces doubt. Progressive Christians believe in the importance of faith being open and not closed – that it is more important to search for truth than to follow fixed doctrines or creeds that cannot be changed.

Soren Kierkegaard's leap of faith

Although he doesn't use the exact words, Kierkegaard is credited with the concept of the "leap of faith." He expresses the importance of thinking carefully in a rational manner about what we believe (our faith) until we come to the point where there is no evidence. To get to faith, we must take a leap past the lack of evidence. This of course takes courage, which many people lack. Tillich makes a strong tie between courage and faith.

Spiritual growth comes only from faith, not doubt

Progressive Christians continue to grow, being open to God speaking to us today in all kinds of ways. If the church is to begin attracting people again on a larger scale, it will have to update both its theology and its expression of that theology. As Spong has pointed out in his dictum, Christianity must change or die, lest it become irrelevant in our modern times.

Community and faith

Tillich stresses that faith, although it may be personal, is best developed within a community of faith, with mutual reinforcement of each other's faith beliefs. As an existential theologian, he is expressing the importance of community embraced by Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Martin Heidegger.

Conclusion

It is important to distinguish between faith and belief and to embrace doubt - the catalyst for our spiritual growth. It is important to reach out to all Christians, seeking as much dialogue as possible. Some of them may be open to a different kind of spiritual expression. As Progressive Christians, we will always welcome anyone who wants to join us on a spiritual journey in the search for truth, regardless of the contours of that journey. IUCC, this challenges us and nurtures us on our personal and joint congregational journey. As we focus on the life and teachings of Jesus and how we can best translate this dynamic faith to reflect agape love, we will be reaching the true essence of what it means to be a Progressive Christian.