

February 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

**Our Snowman Square Dance & Barnyard Ball
on January 20 was a great success!**



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Glenda Wyant



More Snowman Square Dance & Barnyard Ball photos!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes, Glenda Wyant & Pastor Sarah



Photos from DEI's Stop Anti-Asian Hate event on Jan. 28

Photos courtesy of John Haas



Women to Women: The story of a lovely get-together between the women of IUCC and the women of University Synagogue on January 30

Photos & article by Tricia Aynes



It began as a gentle spiritual nudge that grew stronger each year until it blossomed into a heartfelt invitation to explore a deeper and more meaningful friendship.

IUCC had participated in joint Thanksgiving services with the members of University Synagogue for 35 years, yet neither group had tried very hard to initiate a stronger and more meaningful connection. That changed after our most recent joint Thanksgiving Service on November 19, 2023, when IUCC celebrated the life and ministry of Rabbi Arnold Rachlis as he retired. As the service ended, our own Marilyn Smith could resist the nudge no longer. She approached a member of their congregation to see if their women would be open to having a get-acquainted event between our two groups to explore opportunities to offer friendship and support during these difficult times.

It turned out that their women were very receptive to the idea, so much so that they invited our women to a wine and cheese event at their synagogue on January 30! The idea was so popular, in fact, that it drew 18 women from IUCC and more than 30 women from the synagogue.

They put in SO much effort to make the event special. There was great care and thoughtfulness everywhere we looked: from the delicious food, to the festive cake decorated with "Welcome to our IUCC Sisters," to the nametags

carefully labeled with table numbers so we'd be evenly mixed together, to the beautiful table settings.

It was an incredible evening filled with positive energy, good will, and eagerness for more connection. We felt that God was surely in the room with us, expanding hearts and minds to new possibilities for building stronger connections between our two communities of faith.

We heard some introductory remarks from the organizers, then broke into small groups to get better acquainted. We shared stories of our backgrounds and asked one another what we had always wanted to know about Christianity/Judaism but were afraid to ask. We learned a lot!

In the larger group setting, we heard how our Jewish sisters had felt very much alone after the Hamas attack on Israel and how much Marilyn's empathy and invitation had meant to them. We avoided political talk altogether. We brainstormed about how we might meet more frequently and perhaps work on community projects together.

It was a great beginning to what we hope will be a long-term relationship, and we are grateful to the women of University Synagogue for their warm hospitality and all the effort they took to make the event such a success. We look forward to deepening our friendship with them!



Do you want to learn more about safety and security at IUCC?

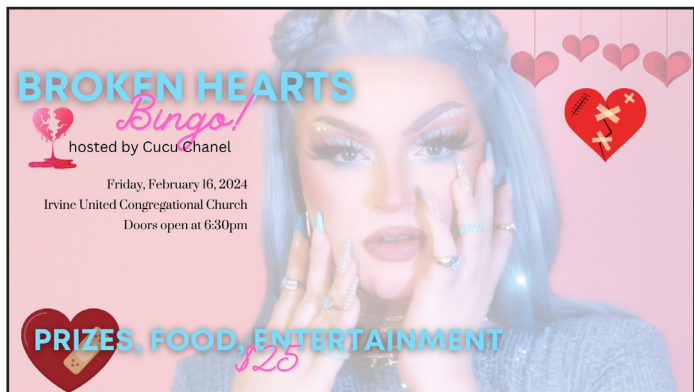
Officer Rick Gramer from the Irvine Police Department will be facilitating a table top emergency scenario to gauge an IUCC response in order to determine our strengths and weaknesses. All are invited to attend. Your participation will make us safer! For more information, please email deacon chair, Maria Carrillo.

Catch up with IUCC events on SOCIAL MEDIA!



- <https://www.facebook.com/irvineucc>
- <https://www.instagram.com/irvineucc/>
- <https://www.tiktok.com/@iucctiktok>
- <https://www.youtube.com/c/iuccorganic>

Broken Hearts Bingo on Feb.16



IUCC is proud to present Broken Hearts Bingo hosted by Cucu Chanel and her Drag Queen Divas. Who needs a Valentine when you have performances celebrating music’s greatest stories of heartbreak?

Friday, February 16, 2024 at 7:00pm at IUCC:
4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine CA 92604 in Plumer Hall

\$ 25 Entry Fee

GREAT PRIZES! GREAT PERFORMANCES! GREAT FOOD & DRINK!

The entry fee gains you access to the games and show. Dobbers, food, and beverages will be available for purchase. Must be 18 years old or older to play.

Childcare provided!

Limited capacity!

Doors open at 6:30pm!

Questions? Please email Pastor Craig at iucc@iucc.org

To buy tickets, click here:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/broken-hearts-bingo-tickets-787604144197?aff=oddtcreator>

From the Senior Pastor

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



I saw this meme the other day that encapsulated what I felt about January - it was a month that went on and on and on! We only had four Sundays, but somehow it felt longer with everything we did together last month. We celebrated Epiphany with star words, MLK Sunday with the Rev. William Sommerville, the Baptism of Jesus with our friends from Peppermint Ridge and who we are as a church culminating in our annual meeting. We danced our hearts out at our winter hoedown - the Snowman's Square Dance and Barnyard Ball and we hosted the Scouts on Scout Hike to learn about the Ten Commandments. We were represented at the Irvine Unified School District Board meeting and the City Council. We hosted the Newport Mesa Irvine Interfaith Council luncheon and learned about different religious traditions and how they grieve death just as we grieved the death of our dear friend Jen Mirmak and then hosted a beautiful celebration of her life. We collected winter coats for those in need and our kids made care packages for the unhoused in our community. We hosted two incredible panels - one by our Ministry with Young People on Queer Education and another by our Diversity Equity and Inclusion Ministry on Anti-Asian Hate. Our guests were incredible and we all learned so much. We received four new members officially into our family: please welcome Luis, Eli, Linda and Joy! We began hosting Anchor Stone Church on Sunday afternoons, a Chinese Christian congregation that holds their services in Mandarin, and rejoice as we are sanctuary to our siblings in Christ. There were lots of Comma Group meetings, Seekers and ministry meetings, and even a gathering of the women of IUCC and University Synagogue! That's not even counting all the ways we used our site this month between our church and preschool, the Justice Fund, AA groups, Amnesty International, a sewing guild, scout meetings, Irvine Classical Players and candlelight concerts -oh, and probably even a recital or two!

And now we start a new month all over again - and February is even longer than usual! I wonder how much ministry we can pack into these next 29 days?

As far as Sundays go, we're starting off our communion Sunday with Evolution Sunday! This year we've invited an entomologist - an evolutionary biologist who specializes in insects! Dr. Boris Baer researches social insect reproduction and immunity by studying Australian honeybees, Panamanian leaf cutting ants, European and American bumblebees. I'm looking forward to thinking about evolution, faith and bugs! I'm told he's even bringing some with him -so that should be fun!

Then it's Fat Sunday! David Caruthers is bringing his band to first service and Alex Ingal is baking up King's Cake - there might just be pancake flipping taking place outside, so don't forget your purple, green and gold and let the good times roll! Of course, Fat Sunday means Lent is on the way, and it will begin with a Valentine's Ash

Wednesday. Don't worry, we're not going to give you candy hearts with your ashes (I might be cheesy-but not I'm not that cheesy!), we'll let the secular world take care of Valentine's Day, but we do hope you'll take the time to join us on February 14 at 7pm for our special service. I'll be available for Drive-Thru Ashes at the church from noon to 1pm outside if you wish to come by for ashes and a blessing. That begins Lent, and Pastor Craig will be at the pulpit for the first

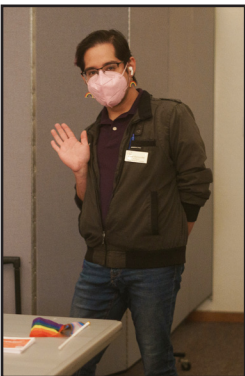
Sunday of the season.

I've been reflecting a lot lately on just how blessed I feel to be your pastor and to have the opportunity to do ministry with you. It's really amazing to think about our reach. We have an impact on so many people throughout our community. I think about the conversations I've had, the stories that have been shared, and the lives that have been transformed. I'm mindful that some people come to our church for a lifetime, while others just pass through for a season, but IUCC has an opportunity to be a part of the journey and hopefully we offer folks hope, maybe some inspiration along the way, comfort when the road is rough, a helping hand, and a listening ear. We don't ever know what a person needs when they walk through our doors - we might find our next best friend, or we might be just a soft landing during a hard time, but it's all part of our willingness to be open and ready to welcome any who find themselves at our sanctuary. Thank you, dear ones, for your open hearts and your desire to share this holy space beyond ourselves. I'm excited to see what this new month will bring, as we continue to watch 2024 unfold!

In shared ministry,
Pastor Sarah



MYP presented a Queer Education panel on January 26



By Tristen Reineccius, Youth Director:
This past month, the Ministry with Young People hosted many events. One of the most recent was a Queer Education panel which featured speakers from Pride at the Pier, Wellness & Prevention Center, PFLAG, and local educators ready to discuss how to support both queer youth and queer educators.

This event was attended by members of our congregation and the local area, which led to a great turnout. We discussed what it looks like to support, how to ensure youth have a welcoming home, the mental toll it could take on both parents and youth and more.

This next month we will have a discussion regarding family mental health in which we are partnering with the Wellness & Prevention Center to bring clinicians to share more! All are welcome.



By Tricia Aynes, member of the audience:
This event provided an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation about how to support our LGBTQ+ youth and teachers in public schools. The goal was to empower parents, youth, and allies by listening to educators and advocates with first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by vulnerable students and teachers.

The panelists agreed that there are a lot of well-funded, organized groups making a concerted push to dismantle public education, and their current issue is parental notification and mandated reporting. It's being done at the expense of queer kids, who are being hurt in the process.

Panelists agreed that it is very important for members of the public to provide letters of support for teachers who are being bullied, because it provides them with a type of "armor" when harmful attacks occur. One LGBTQ+ teacher reported that when she was being harassed on social media, it mattered that her straight colleagues walked her into school each day and matched their lesson plans about tolerance with hers. Another panelist agreed, saying, "Allies have the opportunity to opt into bravery, whereas we (LGBTQ+) teachers don't have the opportunity to opt out of it."

Family support matters too. A PFLAG panelist said, "Stop looking for what you DON'T love about your kids and start looking for what's exciting about them." Another panelist offered, "Treat kids the way they want to be treated. Affirm their gender identity. Call people out in a gentle way when they're not doing that. Provide the kind of trusted and affirming house where they feel safe."

Panelists agreed that being an informed voter is important as well. "Do your research and pay attention ahead of time by helping LGBT-friendly candidates get elected," said one. "By the time they're seated, it's too late."

- photos courtesy of Tristen Reineccius

Legacy Circle



...ensuring our future

Dear fellow IUCC church member,

If you attended church and our congregational meeting on January 28, you most likely were awed by the announcement of a bequest of over \$500,000 from our dear departed church family member, Lynn Carpenter. This gift is all the more remarkable given that Lynn was only a member of our church since 2018. What a gift and a legacy she has bestowed upon us!

Though we have yet to actually receive the check, much thought from the Finance Committee and Administration Board will undoubtedly go into how best to utilize this gift. Despite the size of this bequest, we should certainly not be lulled into any false sense of financial security, especially given that we just approved a budget that included a nearly \$100,000 deficit in our general fund and that that deficit did not include funding for a much needed and long-deferred surfacing of our parking lot or much needed repairs to Plumer Hall.

Given how readily this large request could be consumed, I again want to underscore that we should not be led into a false sense of financial security. We need to continue to have a frugal mindset with everyone continuing to honor the pledges that were made for 2024. We on the Fund Development Committee will continue to actively explore many possible different sources of added revenue. We will attempt to do so in a way that brings more community awareness of our church that will not only help to grow our congregation and but also help avoid solely relying on the generosity of our fellow congregants, but engage more of our community outside of church, such as becoming a venue for weddings or hosting a Goodwill drop-off location.

By maintaining our current pledges and with the anticipated increased revenue from other sources that we develop throughout the coming year, we should ideally be able to keep some of this bequest as an endowment,

or to address needed capital improvements, or to possibly pay down some of our mortgage, and hopefully add to our reserves. All of that is yet to be determined after much thought on how to best utilize this amazing gift.

The big takeaway here is that Lynn Carpenter has truly left a major legacy with regard to IUCC. Her incredible gift just underscores the importance of the Fund Development Committee continuing to develop and grow our Legacy Circle. The Legacy Circle can have a huge impact on the future of our church as Lynn's example so demonstrably shows.

There is no expectation that future legacy gifts will necessarily be as large as Lynn's gift. The size of her gift should not intimidate anyone from considering gifting IUCC as part of their legacy. All gifts of any size will help make an impact on our church. However, hopefully Lynn's gift has provided a lesson to us all that we should get our affairs in order with a will/trust to ensure that our wishes are carried out so that those people and those institutions we care about most are taken care of.

Please give serious consideration to joining Lynn and those of the rest of us that are part of the IUCC's Legacy Circle in adding your name to that group to ensure the future sustainability of our dear church. For more information, go to www.iucc.org and click on DONATE and then scroll down to information about our Legacy Circle. There is an FAQ link that explains a lot of the details. Or, you can contact Duane Vajgrt at dvmd@iCloud.com or 949-795-7318 or Bill Lawrence at walawrence@icloud.com or (949) 375-0418.

In fellowship of service,

Bill Lawrence
Duane Vajgrt
Fund Development Committee Co-Chairs



LEGACY CIRCLE SCROLL

Anonymous
Keith and Renae Boyum
Connie Jones
Marilyn Smith
William Lawrence & Jeffrey Stuckhardt
Jeffrey Benedick & Duane Vajgrt, M.D.

Advocates for Peace & Justice



IUCC's Advocates for Peace and Justice Ministry will host three activities in February and March. You are all invited!

Ballot Forum following First Service on Sunday, February 11

California registered voters will begin receiving ballots in the mail after February 5 for a March 5 election. Voters may cast ballots any time by mail or by using secure drop-boxes, or by voting in person on Tuesday March 5. The election is mostly about primaries, choosing candidates for President and on down, but a state-wide proposition and a City of Irvine proposition will also be decided. As well, this is the election [not a primary] for some down-ballot Orange County races, for judge and for the County Board of Education. Following a familiar tradition when elections roll around, the Advocates will host a ballot forum following first service on Sunday, February 11. A few more words about the March 5 election are included in the column at right.

on Saturday, March 9, the IUCC Advocates will participate in the morning to early afternoon at the Great American Write-In in Santa Ana. See more details on Page 10. We hope everyone can come!

Two Forums on Palestine: February 18 & March 17

The Advocates will show portions of the Anna Baltzer video, *Life in Occupied Palestine*, and will moderate discussions touching on exile, occupation and oppression. Both sessions will be set for 12:30 – 2:00 p.m. and will offer snacks to attendees over the lunch hour.

Advocates co-chair Craig Repp notes that the video, which is not a strident presentation, is the work of an American Jewish woman sharing her own experience of learning about what has been happening in occupied Palestine. Look for more information as the dates draw nearer.

Propositions on the March 5 Ballot Explained

Proposition 1 is a state-wide measure put on the ballot by the legislature. A broad bipartisan coalition approved the measure by a vote of 35 – 2 in the Senate, and by a vote of 66 – 8 in the Assembly. On January 31, the *L.A. Times* noted that the Governor's "Yes on Proposition One" campaign had received more than \$10 million in contributions. The opponents of the measure have raised about one thousand dollars. An official analysis by the Legislative Analyst includes these words:

Overview. Proposition 1 has two major components related to providing mental health care and drug or alcohol treatment to people and addressing homelessness. The Proposition:

Changes the Mental Health Services Act that was passed by voters in 2004, with a focus on how the money from the act can be used.

Approves a \$6.4 billion bond to build (1) more places for mental health care and drug or alcohol treatment and (2) more housing for people with mental health, drug, or alcohol challenges.

Supporters of the measure include Governor Newsom, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Bakersfield Californian*, and donors including the health care companies Sutter Health and Kaiser Permanente, and labor groups representing construction workers and correctional officers.

Opponents of the measure include The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association and the *Orange County Register*, together with a number of small mental health providers and current users of the mental health system who fear that Prop. 1 will diminish the health services that counties currently provide, and may allow more involuntary treatment. The League of Women Voters of California opposes Prop. 1.

The City of Irvine's Measure D proposes to amend the city charter to (1) increase the membership of the City Council from five to seven, with the new membership comprised of a mayor and six Council members; and (2) provides for the transition from at-large elections to by-district elections for the six Council members. Current Mayor and Council members Farrah Khan, Larry Agran, and Mike Carroll are formally in support of the measure, which passed the current council unanimously. They note that the proposed changes are suitable for a city of a population of nearly 300,000, up from the roughly 10,000 who lived in Irvine when the city was founded in 1971.

Cathy R. Schiff, a "concerned citizen," signed the argument against Measure D.

From the Moderator

SNOWMAN SQUARE DANCE WINTER PARTY PROVIDES CARDIO WORKOUT PLUS A DINNER GROUP REUNION

Over 13 years ago, our Fringee Dinner Group began with **Michael Spindle, David Karsten, Jennifer and Steve Bullington, Constance Cassady, Judy and Mike Curry, Sandy Sudweeks, John Habash, Kris Miaco and myself.** We immediately bonded and maintained our monthly dinners for about 7 years. We experienced everything a family can go through: a birth, a wedding, relocations, job changes, health challenges and deaths. From our original group of 11, 7 are still in the area and we had a **REUNION** at the Winter Party. Yah Hoo!

John Habash, the professional clogger in our group, started our party entertainment with an energetic clogging demonstration on a full stomach, yes, he did! Then a professional square dance caller taught four squares of 4 couples each moves building up to a sequence of about 7. We laughed so hard as dancers were going in the wrong direction creating traffic jams but after an hour, there was actually some order. It was so much fun. **John** said he might start a beginning clogging class at IUCC! What a fun way to get our exercise. Stay tuned!

Hugs, Connie



Then
and
Now



Save the Date for GAWI



THE GREAT AMERICAN WRITE-IN IS BACK!

**Saturday, March 9, 9:30am-1:30pm
Delhi Center
505 E. Central Ave,
Santa Ana, CA 92707**

Women For: Orange County, a non-partisan women's group, is pleased to present the 36th Annual Great American Write-In. This free event is offered to the public every year to provide attendees with the means to influence policy decisions by writing letters to their legislators. It's also a great opportunity for participants to experience first-hand what informed citizen involvement in government is all about.

More than 60 different organizations and advocacy groups (including IUCC's own Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry!) will be represented with information regarding some of today's most vital issues, including education, health care, human and civil rights and the environment. Attendees are invited to visit the various tables and then voice their opinions by writing letters to government and corporate decision-makers in the hopes of bringing about constructive change.

PLUS: Special Panel Display from OC Human Relations -- "Orange County Civil Rights: A History of an Enduring Struggle for Equality."

There is no cost for this event; Women For: Orange County will supply the post cards, stationery, postage, refreshments and parking.

Scammer Alert!

Please be aware a scammer is actively reaching out to members of the church. The scam is a phishing email purportedly coming from Pastor Sarah. It might start by asking if you are working, or to please contact her. If you respond, you will get a request to buy gift cards in support of work at the church. Do not be fooled by the personal touch. THIS IS NOT FROM PASTOR SARAH. You will never be sent an email from Pastor Sarah or any of your IUCC staff requesting gift cards. The email being used won't be pastorsarah@iucc.org, but they will use her name and come up with an email that sounds similar. Be on the lookout. If something smells fishy, it probably is!

Please Join Us ...

Mission & Service February Meeting

Sunday, February 7, 2024

Immediately after 1st service
at about 10:30 am
in The Wisdom Room

We will be discussing our February project
supporting Afghan Refugees

If you would like to know more about
our work, please contact either Judy Curry,
Steve Goetz, or Carol Tuch



2/06	Jim Aynes	2/13	Kaytee Macdonald
2/22	Iris Bjorklund	2/25	Brian McComb
2/28	John Emerson	2/23	Alfredo Miaco
2/03	Annika Evensen	2/23	Kris Miaco
2/12	Harley Gimarino	2/06	Dustin Nguyen
2/10	Greg Guth	2/04	Elizabeth Rodriguez
2/24	Alex Ingal	2/03	Matthew Ruiz
2/02	Donna Jacobson	2/15	Peggy Stalter

Welcome

Please welcome these new members, who joined
January 21.

Photos courtesy of Renae Boyum & Pastor Sarah



*Above: Joy Dorko (L) & Linda Avery (R)
Below: Erwin Lewis (L) and Eli Reyna (R),
flanking Pastor Sarah and Felicity Figueroa*



Sunday School Highlights - February Edition: Exploring Lent and More

by Jackie Logwood, Sunday School Coordinator



In our Sunday School sessions this month, we're embarking on a special journey to explore the significance of Lent, emphasizing themes of reflection, hope and joy. Here's a brief glimpse of what the children can look forward to:

1. **Lenten Journey:** We'll be delving into the Lenten narrative, creating an interactive experience that helps our young participants understand the importance of this season. The lessons are thoughtfully designed to make concepts accessible and meaningful.
2. **Creative Activities:** To enhance the learning experience, we've planned a variety of creative activities, including arts and crafts that connect with the Lenten narrative. These hands-on experiences aim to reinforce key lessons and create lasting memories.
3. **Fat Sunday Celebration:** As part of our cultural and festive exploration, we're excited to celebrate Fat Tuesday together. We created plans for a fun-filled day, incorporating elements like a food obstacle course and mask-making activities. This celebration serves as a joyful prelude to the reflective period of Lent.
4. **Special Events:** In addition to our regular lessons, we're thrilled to announce an upcoming event that promises both educational and enjoyable moments for the kids. Stay tuned for more details.

We're looking forward to showcasing the vibrant activities happening in Sunday School!

Lesson plans for Sunday School in the upcoming weeks include the following:

February 4: Our objective is to explore the places Jesus visited during his ministry and to encourage children to consider how they can show God's love in the different places they visit in their lives.

February 11: Our objective is to explore the significance of Fat Tuesday within the church calendar and its connection to the upcoming season of Lent. We'll engage children in a fun and interactive session that incorporates easy-to-clean food, highlights joyous celebrations, and introduces various cultural celebrations.

February 18: Our objective is to help children understand that Lent is like a special gardening time for our hearts, where we plant seeds of positive change and watch them grow as we prepare for Easter.

Recap - January Youth Events

by Dustin Nguyen

We hit the ground running in January with events for our Jr. Youth (ages 9-12) and Youth (ages 13-17).

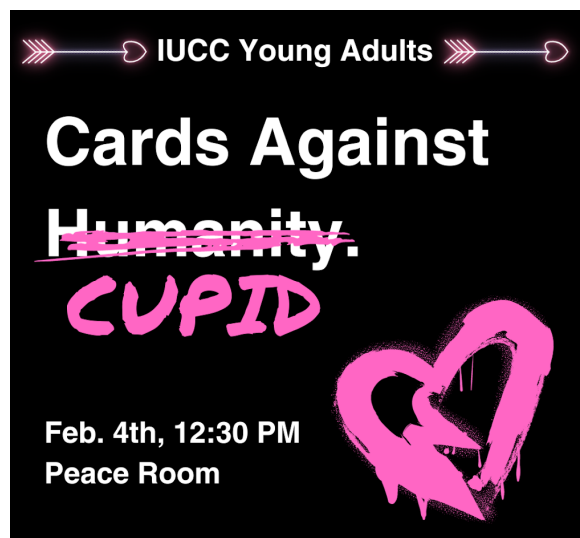
The first Jr. Youth event of the year on January 21st, "Helping Our Unhoused Friends," was a service project in collaboration with Mission and Service. We began with a discussion on how and why someone could experience homelessness. When asked the question of what we can do to help our unhoused neighbors, one of the kids brilliantly chimed, "Protest for better pay!" We've got some future faith-rooted activists here at IUCC. The future is bright.

After the discussion, the kids helped assemble fifteen care packages, putting essentials such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, bandages, and socks into gallon-sized bags. To top it all off, each bag received a handwritten note with an uplifting message that would surely boost the spirits of its recipient. Once everything was done, we all gathered around the bags, zapped them with loving energy as a blessing, and handed them over to Steve Goetz, from Mission and Service. Service project: success!

On January 28th, we had "Pizza and Game Night" for our high schoolers and were ecstatic that one of our teens invited two of her friends from school to come hang out. With Marcus Bode and Alex Ingal (accompanied by Miss Daisy) as adult volunteers, we were set to have a fantastic night of fun. Before chowing down on food, we began with a check-in conversation to see how the teens were doing, which then segued to academics and college.

I have to also give a shout-out to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which had leftover food from their event that happened right before our Pizza and Game Night. Not wanting food to go to waste, I saved the food for the high school event. So not only did we have pizza, but also sandwiches, fruit, and dessert! After our feast, we dived right into a few rounds of the hilarious card game, "Apples to Apples," before calling it a night.

There will be many more MYP events where this came from, such as "Family Art Day" (Feb. 3rd) for all youth and families and "Cards Against Cupid" (Feb. 4th) for young adults. To stay up to date on all the happenings in MYP, email Dustin (dustin@iucc.org) to be added to the MYP Constant Contact mailing list.



A few photos from the day of the Congregational Meeting



The congregation voted to approve the 2024 Budget!



Pastor Craig explained the voting procedure

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Glenda Wyant



Pastor Sarah & Moderator Connie Jones during the meeting



The Aynes Comma Group provided refreshments during Coffee Hour that day

Events of Interest

TACKLE HUNGER

IUCC Youth
are hosting a Soup Drive on
Superbowl Sunday!
Sunday, February 11th, 2024

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

Bon Vivant Dinner
Sharing food, friendship, and fellowship!

Now!

Bon Vivant Dinner Returns!

We hope becoming better acquainted at IUCC is one of your 2024 goals, because Bon Vivant is your easy and enjoyable way to meet fellow IUCCers. 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, and you can also text Debra Banwell at 949-433-1494 to sign-up. The idea is to get to know each other over a meal. Won't you join us on February 24th?

An Extraordinary Experience

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



My biased opinion is that George, my late husband, was a terrific speaker, never dry, never boring, and best of all, he was always relevant. His courage in preaching what he perceived as the truth sometimes led to unexpected results, such as the following.

While at a conference at a local church, I slipped out into the hall to make a phone call. The operator put me on hold and my attention drifted to two women having a conversation nearby.

“The church really needs to do something about homosexuality,” one stated. “I heard the worst sermon last Sunday. We attended a church where the pastor said in his sermon that it’s okay to be homosexual! Can you imagine a pastor saying that?”

My interest piqued, but the operator drew me back to the phone, and the women were gone by the time I finished. However, a few minutes later while turning a corner in the hallway, I came face to face with one of the women I’d overheard.

“Excuse me,” I ventured. “I overheard a conversation you were having regarding a sermon. I’m interested in what you were saying, and wonder if you would care to talk about it. Do you have time?”

She responded eagerly to my request, “Oh yes, I was talking about a sermon I heard last Sunday. Not at this church; we’re members here. It was at another church. The pastor said it’s okay to be homosexual. Can you imagine? It was Easter Sunday and the sermon had nothing to do with Easter. It wasn’t biblical at all. He talked about divorce and unhappy marriages, about being single, and about oppressed people. And he said something about sexual orientation. It was so depressing and had nothing to do with Easter.”

“How did you happen to attend that church on Easter?” I asked.

“My relatives go there so we went with them. That church has had a terrible time. The last pastor was into social

issues, and now *this* one! He’s a man in his fifties and a pastor of the same church body as we are. He shouldn’t be allowed to be a pastor. He didn’t even preach from the Bible.”

In the face of her anger, I said timidly, “I think I heard the same sermon.”

“Really? You were there? Wasn’t it terrible?”

“For me, it was different than what you’ve said.” I paused, searching for words to express myself. “It was biblical. The pastor used the scripture about the two women going to the tomb of Jesus, and they wonder ‘Who will roll away the stone?’ He applied that to our lives by asking, ‘Who will roll away the stones in our lives?’”

Her eyes fastened on mine. I continued, “I heard the pastor suggest some problem areas in people’s lives. He said some in the congregation may be experiencing an unhappy marriage where the gleam in a wife’s eyes has left when she looks at her husband. Others may be single, not because of choice, but because of divorce or death. ‘Or,’ he said, ‘It could be that some of you feel rejected by society and are lonely because of your sexual orientation. Others in our world may be oppressed or hungry and need that stone rolled away.’ The pastor continued to mention several problems and then said, ‘Whatever our needs, the good news is that God is the one who rolls away the stone.’ He went on to list some ways that we can be closer to God and have the stones in our lives rolled away. We, too, can have hope and new life.”

I concluded by saying, “I found it very helpful and biblical.”

“You did?” Her voice and face expressed disbelief.

“Well, I asked my husband, ‘Did you hear him say that homosexuality is okay?’ He agreed that he had. And our teenage daughter said, ‘That pastor isn’t a Christian!’”

With knees shaking and a quiver in my throat, I responded more calmly than I felt, “I know that pastor. I know he is a deeply committed Christian. Even though you don’t accept him, he would be very accepting of you. I know, because he is my husband.”

No longer able to hold back the tears, I stood crying before her. Shock filled her face; with wet eyes she uttered, “I’m sorry.” Putting her hand on my shoulder, she said, “It’s just that I’m so used to our church. We just talk about love.”

We awkwardly shared a gentle hug, parted, and went our ways. It was an extraordinary experience.

Needed-A new Metaphor for Original Sin

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



The evil that men and women do

The doctrine of original sin is terrible theology and blames women for evil in the world, but let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need some way of dealing with and conceptualizing the bad things that people do to other people, the so-called sexist concept of "man's inhumanity to man."

There are many examples of people treating other people in a cruel and evil manner. We will only look at some of them. The Second World War Nazi death camps starved prisoners, while forcing hard labor. We have seen pictures of the mass graves of skeletal figures of men in large piles. In his book, *Man's Search For Meaning*, Viktor Frankl vividly depicts the inhumane and evil environment of the death camps. Deadly experiments were performed on prisoners by Josef Mengele, who has been called "the Angel of Death."

Slavery has existed for centuries, and is chronicled in the Bible. The treatment of black folks by white people is a very sad part of American history, much of which has been swept under the carpet. Slavery was an extension of the white European immigrant/ colonial mentality, which included white superiority and white privilege. We took the Indians' land, and we took black people from their land. Mass graves of murdered indigenous schoolchildren have been found in Canada and other locations. Slave labor produced King Cotton, which became the engine driving the economy of both the South and the North, relying on free labor to produce a great deal of wealth.

The emancipation of slaves was a big economic threat to both the North and the South, but especially to the South. Economic fear rose up in the white people in the South after slaves were freed. There were all kinds of attempts to lure freed slaves back on the plantations, with many false promises. After the emancipation there was a campaign of violence and intimidation that swept the South. Men, women, children, even little babies, were killed.

A more modern-day program of violence and destruction took place at Black Wall Street, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on June 1, 1921. This was a business and finance hub representing great success for the black community. As we have seen cyclically in black history, black accomplishment has continually been destroyed to keep black people from getting ahead.

After the emancipation of slaves, there were celebration parties centered on putting black men to death, either by hanging or burning. This would be a celebratory event with street vendors, dancing and general merriment while a black man was dying.

Jews, the Irish, Italians, and other ethnic groups have experienced terrible prejudice and persecution.

Through the news, we have become aware of physical violence against trans people. What many people may not know is that there is also violence towards trans within their families. There are cases where gay men or trans persons have nearly been beaten to death by their parents because of their sexuality. There have been many cases where parents have disowned the children because they do not have a binary gender.

Just as we have a metaphor for the resurrection, we also need a metaphor that helps us conceptualize the evil that seems intrinsic in human beings. Even good people will sometimes do bad things. I am reminded of the movie "The War of the Roses," with the husband and wife going to great extremes to get back at one another, leaving nothing but chaos in their wake. There is also the old adage that "We hurt the people we love the most." Perhaps it's because strong positive feelings turned negative, in the form of hatred. The opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference.

Evil people who pursue, spread and perpetuate evil

Unfortunately, there are people who want to be evil, who want to spread evil in the world. We have seen a continuing rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States. When a previous president talked about "kung flu," blaming the Chinese for the Covid pandemic, there was a big uptick in violence against the Asian community. We need a metaphor that helps us understand humankind's propensity for evil, especially in some people.

The concept of primal sin

I suggest the concept of primal sin as a metaphor for the evil that exists in humankind, and the evil that is perpetrated from one human being on another. With this metaphor, we can better understand and describe human behavior. It allows us to get a better perspective on our history, and to have a deeper appreciation of the suffering of individuals and groups. It also gives us a greater appreciation of the resiliency of the human spirit, especially seen in black folks. The concept of primal sin becomes an important part of our armament to battle evil wherever it exists, including that which exists within each one of us because of the culture in which we grow up.