

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

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

It was another wonderful All-Church Picnic on Sept. 24 at Mason Park!



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Glenda Wyant



Our youth enjoyed the picnic too!

With special thanks to: Myrna Bohan and her Fellowship team along with the Ministry with Young People who organized all the games, the Deacons who came early to set everything up, Daniel Blackburn and Bill Wall who tended the BBQ and made sure all the food was ready by the time everyone got there, and to everyone who brought delicious food to share! - *Pastor Sarah*

Photos & captions courtesy of Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP



Picnic Egg Race (many thanks to Ms. Myrna and MYP for hosting games)



Picnic Intergenerational Fun (kids around Jerry, learning about his motorbike/scooter)



Picnic kids dining together



Picnic Pup (the kids help to train Fred the Dog)



Picnic Music Together (Michael and Dustin share their musical talents!)



Photos from Rally Day Sept.10

Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah



Moderator Connie Jones & Pastor Sarah had fun on the bounce house slide



Our kids enjoyed the bounce house!



Photos from Labor Sunday Sept.3

Photos courtesy of Glenda Wyant



On September 3, members of Clergy and Laity for Economic Justice helped us celebrate workers on IUC's Labor Sunday.

We welcomed workers from Kingspan and a member of the Writers' Guild, Laura Shapiro, to the pulpit to share their stories. What a fascinating day!





IUCC and the Orange County Equality Coalition (OCEC) will be co-hosting “Read with Royalty” - a story time event with Queen Cucu Chanel on Saturday, October 14, at 10 a.m. at IUCC. We’ll be reading inclusive books with LGBTQ+ positive, gender affirming, multi-cultural stories and offering parents a safe, positive and age appropriate environment where all families are welcome. We invite children of all ages to this family-friendly event!



Halloween Bingo hosted by Cucu Chanel
 Friday, October 20 at 7:00 p.m.
 \$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. Costumes are encouraged but not required!
 Childcare provided! Limited capacity! Doors open at 6:30 p.m.
 Questions? Please email Pastor Craig at iucc@iucc.org

Coming Soon!



AIDS WALK on October 7

Come and celebrate the arrival of autumn with a special Pride walk! It's happening on Saturday, October 7, 2023, at the 37th AIDS Walk Orange County. Join us and honor our LGBTQ+ community and those affected by HIV/AIDS. Be part of the IUCC team! This walk will be an amazing experience filled with happiness, love, and togetherness as we embrace the spirit of our community. You can participate in our "Pride walk," watch exciting performances, play games, and explore the vendor fair. You can choose to walk alone or with a team. There are lots of ways for everyone to be part of this event. Here's the link to **join our walk team or donate** to Team IUCC: <https://donate.radianthealthcenters.org/team/515304>

Attending the AIDS WALK? Why not tell people about IUCC! Just drop by the **IUCC booth** when you are ready and stay as late as you want! Feel free to email Alex at talktome@iucc.org for questions.



Bon Vivant Dinner on October 28

Pre-pandemic, Bon Vivant dinners were regularly scheduled events held each month. We gathered at people's homes, the beach, or a park to enjoy an evening of laughter, camaraderie, life stories and shared experiences. We came away enriched, knowing each other a little better.

The Bon Vivant dinners are back, and they're happening every fourth Saturday! You can sign up as a guest or host. This month's dinner is on October 28 at 6:00 p.m. Space is limited. If you have not already done so, sign up at the information table or contact Debra Banwell by calling or texting her at 949-433-1494.



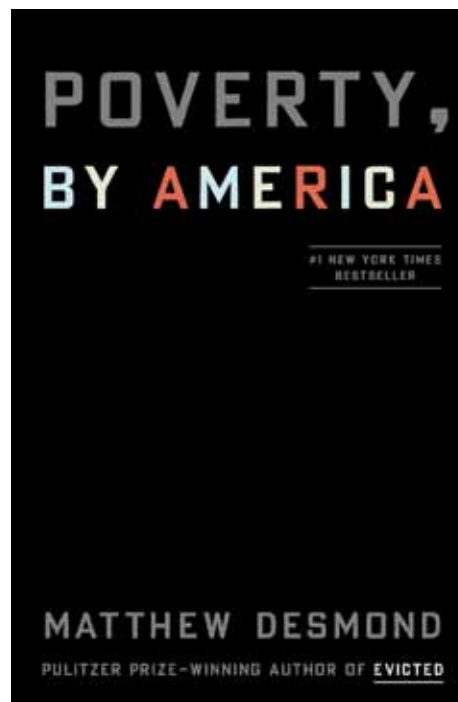
Pre-Thanksgiving Service with University Synagogue

On Friday, Nov. 17, at 7:00 p.m. IUCC and University Synagogue will hold their annual Joint Thanksgiving Service at the synagogue. "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Judaism And Christianity, But Were Afraid To Ask" will be the theme, and there will be a discussion between Rabbi Rachlis and Pastor Sarah. The joint choirs of IUCC and University Synagogue will sing. Pre-registration is 5 required for this event.



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Book Club News

10/25	Jean Arce	10/23	Steve King
10/28	Bil Aulenbach	10/2	Peter Lowry
10/8	Judy Bateman	10/10	Don Mansell
10/27	Steve Bernstein	10/4	Melanie McDonald
10/8	Renae Boyum	10/27	Peyton Nessler
10/19	Ryan Brady	10/8	Brian Osborne
10/8	Martin Bui	10/26	Brian Pearcy-Schofield
10/28	Torrey Capobianco	10/19	Becky Roach
10/7	Brandon Chu	10/27	Susan Sayre
10/25	James Claycomb	10/21	David Schofield
10/17	Lauren Dobbert	10/20	Dave Smith
10/10	Rowan Elliott	10/4	Michelle Stover
10/11	Marc Fitch	10/24	Craig Tysl
10/22	Adam Furtado	10/17	Dale Vaughan
10/3	Nanna Gailiun	10/15	Tiffany Wilding
10/7	Laurie Gaskill	10/29	Heidi Willcox
10/11	Skip Gaskill	10/24	Glenda Wyant
10/14	Amy Henry	10/15	Allie Zane
10/24	Lauren Henry		
10/12	Kyler Johnson		



The next book for the DEI Tuesday Morning book group will be "Poverty, by America" by Matthew Desmond.

Why does the richest country on earth have more poverty than any other advanced democracy? Acclaimed sociologist Matthew Desmond argues it is because we benefit from it - affluent Americans knowingly and unknowingly keep poor people poor. This book shows us another way to understand the issues of poverty and challenges us to think of solutions to end poverty.

Reading schedule:

Oct. 17 - Prologue-Chapter 1
Oct. 24 - Chapters 3-4
Oct. 31 - Chapters 5-6
Nov. 7 - Chapters 7-8
Nov. 14 - Chapter 9 - Epilogue

Poverty, by America

By: Matthew Desmond

304 pages

On Amazon: <https://a.co/d/51elyG7>

A couple of copies are on the DEI library shelf in Plumer Hall. As usual, we meet Tuesday mornings from 9-10:15 am via Zoom.

We hope you will join us!



New Women's Discussion Group: Digging Deeper

IUCC women who want to "dig deeper" into spiritual questions, gratitude, and epiphanies of the soul are invited to join a new discussion group meeting from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month in the church meeting rooms. No outside reading required, but do come with an intent to share from your heart.

To sign up, please send an email with "Digging Deeper" in the subject line to iuccwomen22@gmail.com. Drop-ins welcome. For more information, contact Marilyn Smith at marilynsmithmsw@yahoo.com.

From the Senior Pastor

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



As we head into another busy month of October, I'd like to reflect upon our September. It was quite a month! We began with a phenomenal Labor in the Pulpit observation on Labor Sunday. We heard from workers with Kingspan, a local company here in Orange County, who are in negotiations and are raising alarm about the negative consequences

to the environment and along with that the health of their workers. We also heard from Laura Shapiro, a writer with the Writers Guild, who made eloquent connections between her highly publicized strike and the plight of workers across the nation. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) helped us to put this celebration together, and Adam Overton was particularly thoughtful as he made the connections between Shabbat and strike and their shared root words. I've thought a lot about that throughout the month, as I've reflected on the need for rest and its connection to a faith practice. Congratulations to the writers who ended their 148 day strike.

Then it was our Welcome Back Sunday as the choir came back, and many of us returned from our summer vacations. We had a bounce house for the kids to jump into a new Sunday School year together. The energy in the church was great – we sported our new IUCC tees and showcased our new banners, and it felt like even the building itself was celebrating with us!

The following week our own Father Bil, the Rev. Bil Aulenbach, took to the pulpit for a conversation on his new book, "How to Make Love with Jesus: the Agape Kind." In our conversation, he shared about his growth as a Christian and how he has become much more invested in the questions than hard answers. That was followed by "Stephen Ministry Presents: PIE DAY!" And while there was actual pie, the conversation focused on what it means to be intentionally explicit about our welcome to LGBTQI people as so many have been explicitly hurt by the Church. There was a wonderful panel consisting of IUCC members and new friends led by Pam Rocker.

The last Sunday of September we reflected on Jonah and true repentance as we read a passage often used on Yom Kippur which felt appropriate as we hosted our cousins from the OC Jewish Collaborative for the High Holy Days. While we were at the church picnic, they were getting ready for the holy observations. On Monday, I spoke at

both their services and was a guest at Congregation B'nai Israel. Powerful!

Our Church picnic was a lot of fun. Thank you all for coming! There were about 65 of us at Mason Park playing games, breaking bread and having conversations. One person asked me, "Are all of these people from our church?" and I happily replied, "Yes!" What a great turn out! It was really a special day.

In addition to all of our Sundays we were busy having hosted Alzheimer's OC twice - first for an informational gathering featuring UCC pastor, the Rev. Donna Vuilleumier from the East Coast, to speak with a panel on the spiritual needs of those with dementia. And we ended the month hosting our own Vivian Johnson as she spoke to caregivers sharing her story through excerpts of her book, "Love in a Time of Crisis."

The biggest news comes in celebration of our Ministry with Young People. We have been severely understaffed for a long time, and after trying to find qualified candidates for years (Myrna Bohan interviewed over 60 candidates!) we finally found some superstars! We're so pleased to introduce you to our Director of the Ministry with Young People, Tristen Reineccius, who comes to us with a master's degree in special education and experience with both secondary and elementary age kids. You may have met our new Sunday School Coordinator, Jackie Logwood, who joined us at the church picnic. She is an incredible person with a plethora of skills: she's a director of after-school care and brings a spirit of joy and a heart for justice. And Dustin Nguyen was the first of our hires, as our Youth Coordinator. You've gotten a taste of his energy and passion for progressive Christianity as well as his heart for creative ministry. We can't believe how lucky we got! Good things take time and we're absolutely thrilled we waited for the perfect team to coalesce!

October promises to be another joy-filled month as we begin the month with World Communion Sunday. It's one of my favorite days as we recognize the connection between Christians the world over and focus in on the sacrament we share. Then the following week we're celebrating Blessing of the Animals. Please bring your animals to second service - we'll have a special service of blessing planned on October 8th. I always love to see the diversity of animals who show up! So bring your

furry, feathered, or scaly friends – I'm looking forward to meeting and blessing them. There will also be a time of memorial for those who lost a pet this year, or to remember a pet that you continue to grieve. This is a great service to invite your friends and their "best friend" to join them. So, first service is for people, and second service beginning at 11:15 a.m. is for all God's creatures!

On October 15, the Rev. Dr. Terry LePage will join us as we reflect on her new book, "Eye of the Storm" where she'll help us to see how we can bring comfort in this terrifying environmental crisis. Then we will begin our Stewardship Season on October 22 focusing in on the theme, "Christ Among Us" - a phrase we say every time we share in communion. Who are the Christs among us? How are we called to be Christs in this world? As we reflect upon these questions, may we also reflect on how we can give of ourselves towards the ministry of Irvine United Congregational Church to see, be, and support the Christs among us!

The month of October gets all the fun and we will end it with a family fun service: Spooky Sunday! I think theologically it's important for us to name the scary things in this world, to address the "goblins and ghosts" that sometimes haunt us, and to have fun in our faith. Spooky Sunday lends us the opportunity to do all of that, while also dressing up in costume! Please sign up for Trunk or Treat and let's make this a fun-filled celebration worthy of remembering! And wear a costume. Why not - it's fun!

In addition to all of these fun activities happening on Sundays, we've got a whole newsletter full of more opportunities to connect. Flip through, find a group, attend a lecture or a study, walk with us in the AIDS Walk, head up to Pilgrim Pines for Apple Pie Day, play Bingo with us, come to story time, consider volunteering with our young people, or writing to our elected leaders with our Advocates – there are so many ways to connect at IUCC. I hope you find something meaningful that stirs your spirit and brings you peace and joy!

May October bring you deeper into connection and reflection, to joy and hope, as we seek together to make an impact on our world.

See you at IUCC!



From the Moderator

by Connie Jones



Hello IUCC,

This month, I'm venturing out of my comfort zone and exploring some firsts for me at IUCC. As your moderator, I want to reach out to more social events at church. Usually, if I'm not at a rehearsal of some kind, I'm happy to be home at night with my big dogs listening to a podcast or streaming a detective series. So, here I go out into the night! First came the *Bon Vivant* dinner at the beautiful home of Wayne and Debra Banwell. Ten of us spent a wonderful evening of visiting, sharing stories and eating a delectable dinner at the dining room table. The Banwells are incredibly generous hosts and I am so glad I participated in my first ever *Bon Vivant* dinner. I give the evening five stars! (See *Bon Vivant* dinner photos above and below.)

Next, I went to our annual church picnic and yes, I had never been to one at IUCC before. Well, now I'm sold on this yearly tradition. Aside from having perfect Southern Californian weather, the entire afternoon was a delight. It was a huge family picnic with BBQ, watermelon, games for kids of all ages, music and dogs. Some of us sang Happy Anniversary to Pastor Sarah to the tune of Happy Birthday, as she celebrates being our pastor for 3 years.

This month I have a Comma Group on my calendar. I'll let you know how that goes!



Administrative Pastor Craig Tyrl

Overcoming Fear and Freeing the Creative and Life-giving Inner Voice The Completion of a Journey and the Preparation for a New Challenge

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



Dr. Jerry von Talge



Admin Pastor Craig Tyrl

Spending time with Pastor Craig, I am struck by several things: his honesty in self-revelation and his passionate commitment to spreading agape love, building relationships, and creating community at IUCC. It is apparent that he is an incredibly hard worker, actually, to a fault. I see in him a deep spirituality, from which he views all the world as sacred, including relationships and individuals. I enjoy his intellectual thinking.

The nine year old, creative and dynamic inner voice

Pastor Craig believes we all are born with a nine-year old inner voice, the source of inspiration and creativity, as well as generating life fully with *joie de vivre* (joy of living) and living life fully. After age nine, this voice fades due to the pressures and vicissitudes of modern life. Some people don't even know they have this inner voice.

Pastor Craig's Journey towards self-acceptance and self-actualization

In his early adult years, Pastor Craig was unable to speak or sing in front of even small groups of people. Filled with fear and self-doubt, but with a taskmaster attitude, he enrolled in acting and singing classes. Gradually, he improved his performing skills. Although all actors and singers work very hard to establish their craft, Pastor Craig worked even harder.

After an arduous effort, Pastor Craig had honed his acting and singing skills. He was ready to play a role in the *Pirates of Penzance*. Because of the quality of his performance, he was asked to join other projects at Cal State Fullerton, and eventually to teach acting and singing at this venerable school of the arts. Further, through various acting and singing techniques, he was also able to gradually recover his voice. Now, he wants to help others to find and to recover their voices.

Pastor Craig says that being in the theater and developing his craft transformed his life and brought him much closer to God and the process of recovering his voice

Developing his performance crafts was transformational. His whole life changed in a process of near self-actualization (Maslow). Part of this change was a profound connecting with God in a new and meaningful way. In the past he had wanted to be an Augustinian monk, now he had a whole new relationship with God that was vibrant and powerful. This was excellent preparation for his current pastorate at IUCC. Pastor Craig feels a keen sense of the sacred quality of life. He feels called to build relationships and community at IUCC that are based on Jesus' agape love.

Existentialism, paradox and Pastor Craig's journey

Pastor Craig is a student of existential philosophy. Jean Paul Sartre, one of the leading existentialist philosophers, states that we are totally responsible for creating our own lives and the content of our lives. This personal life creation takes place through all of our thoughts and actions. It is significant that Pastor Craig took the total responsibility for creating his own life, and his self-actualization, through training himself as an actor and singer.

Another prominent existential philosopher was Albert Camus, who believed that life was absurd because it did not yield any universal meaning and purpose for humankind. Closely related to irony and paradox, because they also are non-rational, they did not make rational sense. Life is chock-full of irony and paradox. It is indeed a paradox in which Craig found himself, recovering and rediscovering his inner voice, by putting himself into roles and playing somebody else. He found himself by losing himself in the roles that he played. The better he lost himself, immersing himself in the role, the more he self-actualized himself.

What the future may hold – Yes, a Preacher Man, and more

It is my opinion that Pastor Craig is already a good preacher, but with further effort will be outstanding. My opinion is based on being a preacher myself and having heard some of the trial lawyers, who were among the best speakers in our nation. He has the talent, the theology,

the heart and soul, the oratory skills, and a passionate fire in his belly, that will launch him into a trajectory of excellence. I like Pastor Craig's visceral element in his sermons and the intellectual component too. His passionate sermons are also thinking-man's sermons, nourishing the mind. Craig assured me that he will continue to develop his preaching skills just as he worked to develop his skills acting and singing craft.

Asked where he sees himself five to ten years from now, Pastor Craig shared his dream of being the pastor of a small church. He is hoping that his administrative details will decline and that his pastoral duties will increase as time goes on. It is my prediction that Pastor Craig's self-actualization will continue, and that his future growth will be even greater than that of his transformational past.

IUCC is blessed

Pastor Craig does a yeoman's job with his administrative responsibilities. He has a big heart and gentle spirit. He is deeply spiritual and has a strong intellect. He is committed to seeking out relationships and building community at IUCC. He is a good preacher and an excellent speaker. His passion is inspirational. His spirituality is matched by a robust intellect. There is more of Pastor Craig to be revealed. IUCC is blessed to have him as our Administrative Pastor.



The Status of 2023 Pledges



Dear fellow IUCC congregants,

As of last week, nearly everyone in the congregation should have received their giving summary statement by email. A review of those statements reveals a range from 0 to 100% with regard to the progress of having satisfied the congregation's 2023 pledges.

Given that we are now a little over 3/4 of the way through the fiscal year, we ask that everyone be mindful of their progress towards satisfying their 2023 pledges, realizing that everyone makes payments in a different manner. Some pay a lump sum at the beginning of the fiscal year, others wait and pay the pledge off completely at the end of the year. Many make monthly installments. Some make quarterly installments.

However, you satisfy your pledge, we just ask that you be mindful of the need to satisfy your pledges by the end of the year. With 69% of the church's total revenue coming from pledges, it is such a critical part of keeping us on budget.

Again, thank you everyone for your support of IUCC and its multiple missions through your critically important pledges.

Most appreciatively,

Bill Lawrence

Duane Vajgrt

10 Fund Development Committee co-chairs

Ministry With Young People: Meet our new MYP staff!



Tristen Reineccius
MYP Director

I'm Tristen Reineccius and I am thrilled to be joining your community. I am a recent return to the area after moving out of state for the past few years and experiencing the state of Tennessee. I grew up in a church in Corona in which

I frequently volunteered in Sunday school and VBS. I am thrilled to have found one closer to home. I currently hold a BS in Psychology and an Master of Education in Special Education. I have extensive experience working with children both in and out of the classroom in a range of ages and needs.

In addition to this, I am a mom to a sweet three year old boy and a wife of almost five years. I also own my own photography business that I have worked on since I was in high school. It is deeply important to me as a human, educator, and parent that children (and people as a whole) are embraced, encouraged, and led with kindness. I hope to assist with continuing to grow and encourage the youth of IUCC.



Jackie Logwood
Sunday School Coordinator

Hello, everyone!

I'm Jackie Logwood, and I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to introduce myself to this wonderful church community. For years, I've had the privilege of working in the field of social work, and

my heart truly belongs to the world of children and education. Currently, I serve as the director of an after-school and summer academy, where I get to witness the incredible growth and potential in our young minds. Joining this church team is an exciting new chapter for me, and I can't wait to share my passion for making a positive impact on the lives of others. Looking forward to getting to know each and every one of you!



Dustin Nguyen
Youth Coordinator

Hello everyone!

I'm Dustin Nguyen and I'm thrilled to be your new Youth Coordinator. I'm coming from the Episcopal Church, and if I hadn't been Episcopalian, I would've gone with the United Church of Christ, and most definitely IUCC. I've long admired IUCC as a beacon of progressive Christianity in Orange County and am ecstatic to now be here.

An amusing fact about me is that I was evangelized into Christianity by the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. I wouldn't be a Christian today if not for Buddhism. I've come to embrace this dual-belonging, realizing that my Asian culture and spirituality enriches Christianity, and that it would be a tragedy to throw such expansiveness away.

I believe social justice is an integral part of following Jesus. During the summer, I was one of six selected among a national pool of applicants to be a 2023 Episcopal Ecojustice Fellow. In the program, fellows learn about creation care advocacy and develop a final project to serve their local communities. My final project is called, "Mid-Autumn Vespers," an evening worship service on Zoom themed after the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. The service combines Christianity and Asian spirituality to celebrate the harvest and our interconnectedness with God's creation. I'd like to invite you all to come hear me lead worship and preach on Sept. 28th at 7:00 p.m. if you're available. Please reach out to me at dustin@iucc.org if interested.

Outside of church, I'm a professional actor for stage, camera, and voiceover. Earlier this year, I was in *Colonialism is Terrible But Pho is Delicious* at the Chance Theater in Anaheim, and the Orange Curtain Review has nominated me for Best Featured Actor.

Once again, I'm ecstatic to begin this journey with all of you. I look forward to causing some "good trouble" and finding creative new ways to do ministry in our changing world.

Ministry With Young People - Sunday School

Photos & captions by Lauren Louie, Co-Chair of MYP



Labor Day Assembly Line: We learned about workers rights through a candy car assembly line for Labor Day



Playing outside



Bounce House : During back to church we bounced back into Sunday School!



Labor Day Ms Priya - Hooray for the work educator Ms. Priya does! She is also a master artist and storyteller!



Sun School vineyard workers: With the Parable of the Vineyard workers, we stuck "grapes" on some very encouraging teen mentors!



Sunday School History Good & Bad: With the story of Joseph and his brothers and marker towers, we learned the importance of remembering history & trial and error.



STEPHEN MINISTRY AT IUCC ...

by Bil Aulenbach, retired Episcopal priest

We have trained 5 members of IUCC to be Stephen Ministers. Collectively, they have a great deal of life's experience and are warm, caring humans. This year's class was unique in many ways:

1. It was all men.
2. There was a tremendous variety:
 - 2 military vets
 - 2 ordained clergy
 - 1 staff person
 - 2 young people
 - 1 psychotherapist
 - 1 differently-abled

(Annie and I have a daughter who is severely deaf, legally blind, slightly cerebral palsied, epileptic and a couple of other issues. She is a college graduate, lives independently in Seattle and works full-time. She labels herself as "differently abled." That's good!)

Surprisingly, we are having problems lining them up with "care partners" or "care receivers," so the SM team is asking our church members to help us. A care receiver is usually someone who is going through some sort of crisis, some big, some small. It could be that they are lonely, housebound, lost a job, differently-abled, a veteran trying to adjust, dealing with a separation or divorce, or are 24/7 caregivers. They do not have to be church members or even religious. (SMs only discuss religion if their care partner wishes. There is no proselytizing.)

The primary task of the SM is to be a good listener and to consistently meet with their care partner for an hour or so every week to be a consistent supporter. DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHOSE LIFE MIGHT BE ENRICHED BY SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY? Please call either Dave Schofield, SM Leader, (949) 300-1216, or IUCC's Administrative Pastor, Craig Tyrl (949) 733-0220.

Peace Love Joy Hope

Bil



PC @ IUCC ...

by Bil Aulenbach, retired Episcopal priest

Probably the most important feature of Progressive Christianity for me is that EVERYTHING about Christianity is available for doubting, questioning and discussion. At IUCC, I can ask, "Does God really exist or is it a man-made creation?" without being excommunicated, defrocked or expelled from IUCC. Then I am free to explore the question and search for the ideas of others, even atheists and agnostics.



I am allowed to ask, "Is the Bible really the Word of God and, if so why and how?" I am then able to turn to whomsoever I wish for answers. Above all, no answer is really wrong, just a difference of opinion. How about, "Was Jesus the Son of God? How did that happen?" and a group of people in a room can have a discussion without fear of negative repercussions. IUCC is unique in this area.

In my Episcopal church, I can't call God, "NoOneUpThere" (as I do in some of my books) suggesting that I don't believe in an anthropomorphic God who lives in mansions above the third filament of the flat earth. In that church, most of their prayers suggest that NoOneUpThere is Up-There and He is a white guy always pulling strings, making things happen, often bad things happening to good people.

At IUCC, I'm allowed to say that as well as express my belief that Creation, the Ground of all Being, is my God. That's why IUCC offers so many opportunities to grow in your faith because we know that a stagnant faith is a dead faith.

Peace Love Joy Hope

Bil



Say It Now!

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." - William Arthur Ward

It's October again. This is the month when I start ruminating on who has significantly impacted me throughout the year. Why bother, you ask? Because at thanksgiving time I write a letter of thanks to someone outside of my family for whom I'm grateful, a

practice I've enjoyed for 60 plus years.

Such a letter is not a chore. It's a delightful recall of someone special. My list of letter receivers is fun to peruse each year. I've written to authors, a housekeeper, my children's in-laws, a bishop, newspaper columnist, professor, editor, counsellor, friend, neighbor, clergy, physician, co-worker, realtor ... the list goes on.

While enjoying the act of thanking someone, another fun part of this exercise is to receive a response to my letter. I wrote a gratitude letter back in 1989 to Jim Klobuchar who is the father of Amy Klobuchar (currently the senior United States senator from Minnesota), when Jim was a columnist for the Star Tribune, a newspaper of the twin cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul. His gracious response is filed as one of my favorite pieces of correspondence. Another notable response is from prolific author Jodi Picoult whom I emailed on Thanksgiving morning in 2018. Imagine my surprise to receive her appreciative email response twenty-two minutes later -- on Thanksgiving Day, no less.

Don't we love it when someone expresses true appreciation for us? William James, a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher, claims that *"The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated."* We remember how people make us feel; a compliment and words of gratitude make us feel good and valued. We love to be around a person who graces us with their gratitude.

I was surprised but delighted to learn that a Southern California professor teaches and conducts research about gratitude. Giacomo Bono, an Associate Professor of

Psychology at California State University, Dominguez Hills, wrote *"Gratitude can only become a defining character strength through conscious practice, by frequently recognizing the individuals and occurrences that we are grateful for."*

Professor Bono's claim that we need to practice expressing gratitude reminded me that years ago I heard the quip, *"Practice makes perfect, so be careful what you practice!"* If we become practiced at lying, cheating or self-pity, we could get quite good at such negatives. Conversely, if we practice gratitude, we may find that we focus more on the good in life, and less on what we don't have, or on the failings of others. Gratitude counters a person's cynical and critical attitudes.



Personal gratitude in the midst of difficulties and adversities is especially beautiful to behold. Rabbi Harold Kushner addresses this: *"If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul."* In other words, a spirit of gratitude benefits the giver, not

only the receiver.

Thanksgiving Day is my favorite holiday. Yes, the other holidays are important to me, but a day devoted to gratitude rises to the top of my list. I'm disappointed that in our society we leap from Halloween to Christmas, giving only a nod to Thanksgiving Day. It's a day with no presents, no roaming the neighborhood for candy, no weeks of preparation. Yes, we overeat. But we do that on the other holidays as well.

Though Thanksgiving Day is an American tradition, think of what it could be like to have an International Day of Gratitude. Such a day could be celebrated by people everywhere, by citizens of every nation, race, culture, or religion. I wonder what impact that might have on our international relationships.

Albert Schweitzer is quoted as saying, *"Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude."* In other words, I think he meant that we should say it -- or write it -- now.

Op Ed: Throwing the Baby Out With the Bathwater - Progressive Christianity, Give us back our God

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge



I consider myself to be as progressive as any Progressive Christian, yet the eight points - and now the five points - of Progressive Christianity, do not include my faith, leaving out any statement about the existence of a living and present God. I have been left out,

and I am not happy about it. Indeed, the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater. Paradoxically, in this case, the baby is God. I embrace progressive Christianity, but in the same spirit of this quest for a more authentic faith, I want to challenge, in agape love, the main points of Progressive Christianity as being deficient.

Nietzsche's madman, carrying his lantern from village to village, was announcing the death of God. Progressive Christianity's points of belief are not guilty of killing God, but have nevertheless silenced any talk about God. In their faith statements, God cannot be found. In an IUCC class on Progressive Christianity, I was told I could not talk about God, we were only going to talk about Jesus.

When I was in seminary in the mid 60's, existentialism was widely popular. This became the minor in my studies. Friedrich Nietzsche was/is my favorite existential philosopher, in spite of his polemics (written attacks) against Christianity. In his Parable of the Madman, Nietzsche not only announces the death of God, but he also states that God has been killed by Christians. How prophetic. Although not killing God, modern day Progressive Christianity has deleted God from its points of belief. This is an incredible deletion of theology, the foundation of any Christology. Jesus, who called God "Abba," has lost his Father.

Many of us Christians believe in God, whether we are progressive or not. To take away this foundational belief leaves us believers in God out in the cold. Not only has God been left out, but there has also been

a deconstruction of metaphysics, which is a vital part of our Christian faith. Progressive Christianity needs to embrace all Christians, and not take away the very foundation for the faith of the vast majority of Christians. This is a serious mistake, and must be corrected if Progressive Christianity is to thrive.

If you "Google" Progressive Christianity, you will find a barrage of attacks against their faith statements by a variety of conservative and fundamentalist Christians. I do not want to join this fear-based reactionary parade. I embrace Progressive Christianity, and I am grateful for the points of faith. I want to add a corrective to their points of faith, though: the foundational belief in God. Without this foundational belief, I fear that progressive Christianity might destroy itself, which would have delighted Nietzsche.

Spong, in his book, *Beyond Belief*, states that we must totally revamp the elements of our Christian faith on a continual basis in our current scientific age. However, rather than rejecting theology, he states that God is our ground of being, an existential concept taken from the theologian, Paul Tillich. Any discussion of metaphysics could easily turn people off - for being some esoteric, intellectual exercise that has very little to do with our daily lives. Metaphysics is essential to our everyday lives, as well as our Christian faith. Simply put, metaphysics is a term and philosophical inquiry that expresses the importance of realities of the basic understanding of ourselves, individually and collectively, as well as the life we live, and our place in the world around us. Embracing metaphysics is vital to understanding who we are and how we relate to the world in which we find ourselves, including our relationship to the universe and all that exists beyond our universe.

Metaphysics focuses on important issues in our life. These are some of the questions that metaphysics seek to explore for the basic understanding and enhancement of our lives:

- What is the basic meaning of purpose of each of our lives?
- What is our place in the universe?
- What is consciousness?
- What is intuition?
- Why is prayer important?
- Does God answer our prayers?
- Does the world really exist?
- Do we really have a free will?
- Does any of this -even my act of questioning - really matter?

These realities cannot be seen nor experienced by any of our senses, therefore cannot be empirically validated. Faith itself is metaphysical because it cannot be empirically validated. The concept of God, probably the ultimate metaphysical reality, certainly cannot be validated empirically, so it is the first casualty of the deconstruction of metaphysics.

Quantum physics, going far beyond what can be empirically validated, has totally decimated any attempt to reduce an understanding of life, bereft of that which cannot be seen nor empirically validated. Quantum physics is the exemplar of metaphysics. According to Peter J. Lewis, ***“We can say quite confidently that quantum mechanics is metaphysically revisionary even if it is not clear what form the revisions should take.”*** Progressive Christianity, you need to keep up with the times.

The term “deconstruction” means breaking things down into smaller parts. Deconstruction looks at the smaller parts that were used to create an object, in our case, God. Jesus speaks of God many times. With Progressive Christianity, theology has been broken down, to be replaced by a crippled Christology. Simply put, Jesus has replaced God.

Albert Camus was the proclaimer of an absurd world that makes no sense because there is no intrinsic meaning and purpose in our human existence. He also states that we must live a life without metaphysical appeal, a life without God. I reject Camus’ category of the absurd, and I don’t want to live the barren life he proposes - a life without God. A somewhat less barren life comes from the Progressive

Christianity’s statement of faith, with an absent God. We Christians who believe in God find great meaning and purpose, which I am unwilling to give up.

Progressive Christianity, give us back our God. Do not reinforce the atheistic ideas of Camus and Nietzsche. Let’s stick to the parables of Jesus, and not reinforce Nietzsche’s Parable of the Madman. You have come dangerously close. Please put God into your points of faith.



For reference, **The Center for Progressive Christianity** (www.progressivechristianity.org) lists the following 5 Core Values:

1. Believe that following the way and teachings of Jesus can lead to experiencing sacredness, wholeness and unity of all life, even as we recognize that the Spirit moves in beneficial ways in many faith traditions.
2. Seek community that is inclusive of all people, honoring differences in theological perspectives, age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, class or ability.
3. Strive for peace and justice among all people, knowing that behaving with compassion and selfless love towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe.
4. Embrace the insights of contemporary science and strive to protect the Earth and ensure its integrity and sustainability.
5. Commit to a path of life-long learning, believing there is more value in questioning than in absolutes.

