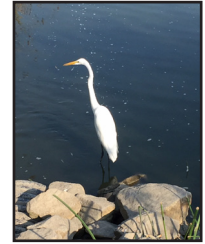
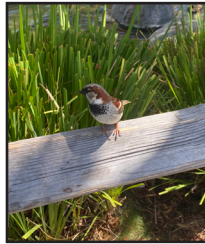
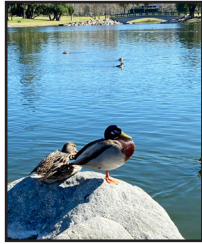


May 2024 | www.iucc.org | Catch up with us on Facebook, Insta, Tiktok, and YouTube!

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

Invitation to the IUCC Spring Congregational Meeting



Dear Friends,

Please join us on **Sunday, May 19**, for our **ANNUAL SPRING CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**. Highlights of this meeting will include: **Election of 2024-2025 Leaders; Written Reports from Ministry & Committee Chairs; Pastor's Report; Treasurer's Report; and Proposed Ceasefire Resolution** (see explanation and text of Resolution on pages 8-10 of this newsletter).

This meeting will be held in person in the sanctuary, with Zoom access available for those joining us remotely (information on online participation will be provided in the e-blasts).

What: Annual Spring Congregational Meeting

When: Sunday, May 19, 2024, at 10:30 a.m.

Where: In person in the sanctuary with Zoom access online (hybrid)

Please note that only corporate members may vote at congregational meetings, and we need a quorum of such members to conduct the business of the church. It is very important that you attend!

For those interested in learning about what will be discussed at the meeting, you are invited to attend the Information Forum.

What: Information Forum

When: Saturday, May 11

Where: Hybrid

These regular congregational meetings are important to the life of our beloved church. Your participation matters, and we look forward to seeing your smiling faces!

In community,
Connie Jones
Moderator

IUCC Work Day Photos from April 28



Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah



IUCC unveils new Goodwill drop-off location

Article and photos by Pastor Sarah



On Friday April 5th at 10am at IUCC, board members and I gathered to welcome Goodwill to our campus. Along with Vice Mayor Larry Agran and Goodwill President and CEO Nicole Suydam, we cut the ribbon and opened the new Irvine Drop-off location for Goodwill of Orange County. It was a rainy morning, but the sun came out for our celebration and it was all smiles as their staff and board members joined with our leadership and the community to celebrate.

IUCC will host Goodwill on Fridays and Saturdays from 8am-5pm. We're very excited about this opportunity to serve our community, as Irvine residents have been without a drop-off site for some time since the previous location began renovation and needed to close the site. In March of 2023, Nicole called me and shared that they were looking for a new location. We had met when she was the executive director for Second Harvest, a wonderful local food bank here in Orange County. This sounded like a wonderful opportunity for IUCC to be of service and to live into our strategic goal of partnering with like-minded organizations and to use our facility to help the community. This not only serves our local community by encouraging re-use and donations, it also helps employ people who often find it challenging to obtain a job. They are helping IUCC by making a monthly contribution so it is really a win-win!

To learn more about Goodwill we held a field trip on April 17th and a few IUCCers took advantage of the opportunity to see how it works. Did you know they have been in Orange County for over 100 years? It was founded by a Methodist pastor, so it seems fitting that we are hosting their site as we continue to live out the mission for which it was created.

Goodwill staff members were incredibly generous with their time, demonstrating their gratitude for our partnership as we toured the facility. I shared about my experience in my Earth Day sermon on April 21st. It was incredible to see what happens when you drop your old stuff off at our site on a Friday or Saturday and how many opportunities it has for a second life. Goodwill serves our community by offering low cost second hand items and keeping stuff out of our landfills, and it is committed to job training with a very impressive structure in place to serve and uplift those who go through their program.

We're very excited about beginning this relationship with the Goodwill and hope that you'll stop by on Fridays or Saturdays to donate your unwanted items so they have a chance at a second life and don't end up clogging our landfills.



Women to Women: Second Date with University Synagogue Women

Article and photos by Tricia Aynes

Fifty women from IUCC and University Synagogue (US) got together in Plumer Hall on April 30 for a heartwarming evening of food, friendship and sisterhood as we met in small groups to engage in meaningful conversation. This event built on the initial “first date” the synagogue women hosted for us back in January after Marilyn Smith first approached them about strengthening our bond. They were so warm and hospitable that we wanted to see them again and reciprocate!

We encouraged attendees to introduce themselves and talk about how they felt about the situation in Gaza. The conversations were cordial and respectful, and we discovered we were not far apart at all. As you can see from the photos, women were delighted to talk and share ideas about how we could do more together. Comments after the event were universally glowing: “It was lovely, and I appreciated the opportunity to discuss the current issues in Israel”; “Excellent - lots of energy and good discussions”; “Wonderful!”; “Good schmooze!”; “Loved it! I appreciated the conversation topics”; “Excellent - good conversation and great food!”; “Very nice & welcoming”; “Interesting and stimulating”; “It was wonderful - I always love meeting new people and sharing ideas”; “It was perfect - thank you!”; “Loved meeting IUCC women”; “Fun! Connecting! Inspiring!”; “Thoughtful and intelligent”; “Very interesting - I learned a lot from others with different perspectives”; “Fantastic table of wonderful, bright, open ladies”; and more in the same vein. We look forward to more get-togethers with them in the future! Marilyn and I are so grateful to our generous-spirited IUCC women for pitching in to assume many responsibilities for the event and for providing our guests with such a loving, caring and gracious welcome. Thank you so much!



From the Senior Pastor

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



What an April! It began in the afterglow of Easter with the Grand Opening of our Goodwill site that first Friday (read more about it on page 3) and led into the second Sunday of Easter when Pastor Craig ended our Wandering Heart series. What an interesting journey, to spend so much time with Peter through Lent, Easter and beyond! I went eclipse

chasing, an unbelievable experience that was incredibly meaningful, exhilarating and cosmically connective. We came back for Creativity Sunday where we explored the concept of creativity theologically at the pulpit delving into process theology and the idea that God is not (just) Creator, but Creativity itself. Artists Jenna Wadsworth and her friend Kadim demonstrated co-creation as they co-created artwork throughout the two services, and Mike Willcox shared his musical creativity by performing a powerful song in first service on guitar and vocals. During Coffee hour, Vivian Johnson organized 17 Creators of sorts who shared their creations. From wood working, jewelry making, baking, books, and artwork - there was such a swath of creativity that we were awed by the many talents of our congregation and some even sold their creations for us to take home and enjoy!

April just kept giving as we celebrated Earth Day with guest Patty Oh from Cool OC who shared with us the Irvine Green Challenge and inspired us to be more mindful as we make decisions to benefit our planet. Then on the final Sunday of the month, we joined with our denomination in celebrating Pacific-Islander Asian American Ministries Sunday and participated in a pulpit exchange with 17 other churches. Pastor Mitchell Young from Montebello Plymouth Congregational Church is the local and national PAAM representative and the coordinator of Southern California Nevada Conference pulpit exchange for the day. When our preacher was unable to attend he recorded himself and shared a really fun sermon that inspired us to reflect on the fruit of the vine and our connections with one another, as we also learned about asian fruits! We had some sweet smelling dragonfruit, starfruit, bitter melon, korean melon and pomegranate on the altar to connect us with our Asian church friends.

Beyond Sunday worships, there was a Bon Vivant dinner, a forum on Palestine, a newcomer welcome luncheon, a field trip to the Goodwill, and an all-church work day. I especially want to thank everyone who participated in the

work day. It was smaller than ones we've had in the past but those who came did a lot of work!

I want to give a special shout-out to our second service folks, most of whom are newer to IUCC, who really gave of their time and talent. We got a lot done: from window washing, inventorying, changing lightbulbs, and most exciting - refreshing our Plumer restrooms. Those restrooms hadn't been touched in a LONG time. They once had wallpaper that was just textured and painted over (and looked awful). They've now been re-mudded, drywall fixed and painted, and we have new sinks, lights, and a mirror. In our effort to be intentionally gender inclusive, both bathrooms will now be single/family use. They are both ADA accessible. Swing by Plumer Hall and check out the new look!

Finally, the month ended on a really special gathering I was so fortunate to attend as the women of IUCC hosted the women of the University Synagogue. With all of the pain associated with the turmoil in Palestine and Israel we wondered what the gathering would feel like. They chose to name the elephant in the room and talk about it. Were we on the same page? Surprisingly, in many ways we were. If you're like me, and have seen the heart wrenching tearing apart of our community at places like our city council, you would have been awed at the respectful sharing and caring that took place around those tables.

For now, I continue to pray for a ceasefire. I see this as the only way to stop the daily death count in Gaza, to address the starvation and get aid in, and to get the Israeli hostages back. Every bomb that goes into Gaza could attack a place where a hostage is held. I have been so very disappointed and saddened to see how calls for peace have been interpreted as anti-Semitism. As I always have, I denounce antisemitic words and actions, my heart breaks to hear Jews share their feelings of isolation and fears of being hated. However, I think calls for peace, to protect Palestinians, even to criticize Israel, are not anti-Semitic. I joined some of our members at an action at UCI, and what I witnessed was a peaceful protest. It was certainly pro-Palestinian. There was a chant about being "free from the river to the sea" but I heard no criticism of Jewish people, no anti-semitic slurs, no mention of the Jewish tradition at all. I don't discount the feelings of our cousins, but I will say that what I witnessed was absolutely a call for peace, a plea for humanitarian aid, and a demand to end the violence.

From the Senior Pastor continued from page 5

As a Just Peace church we recognize that peace without justice is not peace. But Peace can never be in the midst of war. We must find another way. For this reason, I'm joining with our Advocates for Peace and Justice Ministry and the three other UCC churches who have helped to craft the resolution to be presented to our congregation at our annual meeting to call for a lasting ceasefire.

There is a lot happening this month. I'm looking forward to a return of our Drag Queen Bingo with Cucu Chanel - she's gone country! Can't wait to experience another fun event that serves as such a wonderful outreach to our community, a witness to the LGBTQ+ community and a way to fundraise for our church. We'll be celebrating Scout Sunday, Mother's Day, and Pentecost this month - so don't miss our Sunday worships.

May it be a month of joy, sunshine, relationship building and peace,

Pastor Sarah

Thank You!



Dear IUCC leadership:

I am writing to thank you for hosting a Goodwill drop off center on your campus. Goodwill's mission of supported employment for people with disabilities is so important to my family. My son, Adam, (pictured) has been an employee at a Goodwill thrift store for many years. The collections at your campus directly contribute to his work and independent living.

Thank you again,

*Mark Humphreys
Irvine*

From the Moderator

by Connie Jones



BINGO, BOOTS AND BIRTHDAY!

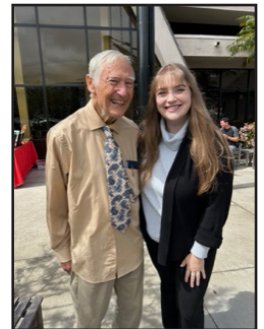
If you haven't been to one of our drag bingo nights yet, please consider attending the next western themed one on May 17th in Plumer Hall. WHY? You could win up to \$200! It so happens, this is the same week as my birthday and both my daughters are attending as we celebrate together. Come by our table and give me a birthday hug! Yes, this is a picture of me at about 5 years old riding a pony. Were you like me, wishing for a horse every year?

SINGING MAKES US SMILE!

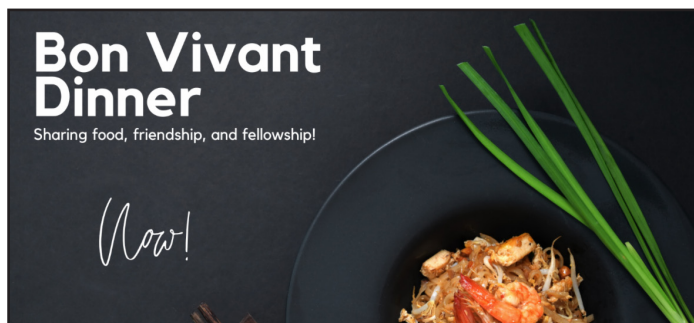
Have you ever wondered why our chancel choir members look so happy? Research has shown that singing boosts those endorphins and may help lower stress, boost immunity and lung function, enhance memory, improve mental health and help cope with pain.

I've often thought how our choir is like a comma group the way we meet regularly and how after a rehearsal we share cares, concerns and joys. We are a family within the church family.

Pictured here are our oldest and youngest members of the choir. At 92 years old, Bill Bonney just loves to sing and we are always so happy when he joins us. The very talented Jenna Hansen is our soprano intern and she is 24 years old. She will be graduating soon to pursue her vocal career. Now would be a good time to visit us as we begin preparations for our June concert. We rehearse Thursday evenings from 7:15-9 p.m. Come join us!



Coming Attractions



Bon Vivant Dinner on May 25

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 can text Debra Banwell at 949-433-1494 to sign-up for the next dinner.



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

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

A poster for a choral concert. The background is a dramatic sky with clouds and a bright sunburst effect. The text "IUCC's Chancel Choir presents:" is at the top in a white, sans-serif font. Below it, the title "Magnify the Light" is written in a large, elegant, brown cursive font. Underneath the title, it says "A concert of inspirational choral music to celebrate the Light and Love around Us." in a smaller, brown, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the date "Sunday, June 9, 2024" and time "7:00 pm" are written in a large, white, sans-serif font. The location "IUCC Sanctuary" is written in a yellow, sans-serif font on the left. On the right, it says "A freewill offering will be taken to benefit the IUCC General Fund." in a small, white, sans-serif font.

SAVE THE DATE! The IUCC Chancel Choir will present a concert of choral music on Sunday, June 9, 2024 at 7:00 PM in the Sanctuary. The theme of this concert is "Magnify the Light" with lots of varied vocal and choral music. Some song highlights include: "Magnify the Light" by Carl Strommen, "Lux Aeterna" by Brian Schmidt, "Seeking Light" by Brandon Williams and "Where the Light Begins" by Susan LaBarr. Be ready to tap your toes and be inspired through music as we gather once again in community for our June concert. We hope to see you all there. Admission is free with a freewill offering taken during the concert.

Ceasefire Resolution to be considered at Congregational Meeting

The Advocates for Peace & Justice have recommended this resolution to the congregation. It calls for a ceasefire that we would sign onto with Mount Hollywood Congregational Church, Congregational Church of Fullerton, and Brea Congregational United Church of Christ to be presented to the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ at the annual meeting in June.

An introduction from Dave Smith, Co-Chair of the Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry:

This resolution was written, initially, by two or three Orange County UCC churches -- they intended to introduce it for the Southern California/Nevada summer meeting in June. They also hoped that IUCC would endorse this resolution. It calls for attention to be addressed to the conflict in Gaza. In order to bring this violence to an end, the resolution calls for a complete CEASEFIRE between the Palestinians and the Israelis (including the fighting forces on both sides). We read and discussed this resolution at our April Advocates for Peace and Justice meeting held the third Sunday of the month after the second IUCC church service. Nine people were in attendance at the meeting including both myself and Craig Repp (the two of us are the Advocates co-chairs). We unanimously approved the ceasefire resolution as the Advocates ministry. We also recommended that this resolution be brought to a vote at the IUCC Congregational meeting on Sunday, May 19th. The text of the resolution is included below. We hope that IUCC will support the resolution at the Southern California/Nevada conference meeting in early June.

A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR AN IMMEDIATE & PERMANENT CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

SUMMARY

We understand that the underlying causes of the siege of Gaza are both complex and simple, deep and ongoing. This resolution seeks to issue public witness to the atrocities occurring in Gaza that are contrary to Christian values and international law. Following our own convictions, listening to the voices of Palestinians and interfaith allies, and discerning the movement of the Spirit, we call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

This resolution is grounded in the repeated Biblical call from the prophets to do justice:

From Isaiah, "Get your injustice out of my sight! Cease to do evil and learn to do good! Search for justice and help the oppressed! Protect those who are orphaned and plead the case of those who are widowed!" (1:16b-17)

From Jeremiah, "YHWH God says: Act with justice and integrity: rescue the victim from the oppressor; do not oppress or mistreat resident aliens or the orphaned or widowed, and don't shed innocent blood in this place." (22:3)

From Amos, "Instead, let justice flow like a river, and righteousness flow like an unfailing stream." (5:24)

And from Micah, "Listen here, mortal: God has already made abundantly clear what 'good' is, and what YHWH needs from you: simply do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk with your God." (6:8)

We hear again in the teachings of Jesus a call to seek justice and be peacemakers, following in Jesus' example:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice: they will have their fill." (Matthew 5:6)

"Blessed are those who work for peace: they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of their struggle for justice: the kingdom of heaven is theirs." (Matthew 5:9-10)

"The Spirit of our God is upon me: Because the Most High has anointed me to bring Good News to those who are poor. God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those held captive, recovery of sight to those who are blind, and release to those in prison – to proclaim the year of our God's favor." (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

In living into this scriptural call to do justice and seek peace, the 15th General Synod affirmed that the United Church of Christ is a Just Peace Church. That affirmation calls upon each local church to become:

"a community of solidarity with the poor, seeking to be present in places of oppression, poverty, and violence, and standing with the oppressed."

"a community of resistance, standing against social structures comfortable with violence and injustice."

"a community of political and social engagement, in regular dialogue with the political order, participating in peace and

justice advocacy networks, witnessing to a Just Peace in the community and in the nation, joining the social and political struggle to implement a Just Peace.”

This resolution furthers the Just Peace work and calling of the United Church of Christ. Just Peace is more than an end to violence. It calls for peace that is just, including that “people everywhere will be able to meet their basic needs, including the right of every person to: food and clean water, adequate health care, decent housing, meaningful employment, basic education, participation in community decision-making and the political process, freedom of worship and religious expression, protection from torture, and protection of rights without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or national or social origin.”

This resolution continues the long history of resolutions and actions of the United Church of Christ concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ten resolutions have been endorsed by the UCC in the past 50 years, including:

Affirming the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live peacefully within internationally recognized borders (1973).

Rejecting the theological claims of Christian Zionism (2003).

Reallocating US foreign aid to constrain the militarization of the Middle East; supporting organizations committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict (2005).

Resolving to use the economic leverage of the United Church of Christ to divest from companies that profit from the occupation of Palestinian territories (2015).

Identifying Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land and the human rights abuses it has committed there to be a major source of conflict and calling for an end to settlement activity (2019).

Declaring a need for Just Peace between Palestine and Israel (2021).

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, antisemitism is an ancient, ongoing, and global threat to the thriving and well-being of our Jewish neighbors. WHEREAS, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate is an enduring threat to the thriving and well-being and safety of our Muslim and Palestinian neighbors.

WHEREAS, we recognize the attacks by Hamas of October 7 to be a profound and seemingly insurmountable violation.

WHEREAS, Christian Zionism, rooted in antisemitism, has distorted historic and religious legacies, and diminished the rights and claims of local residents.

WHEREAS, we bear witness to the ongoing killing of thousands of innocent civilians, and the inflicting on Gazans conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part, which, according to the International Court of Justice of the United Nations, “appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [Genocide] Convention.” (see Notes).

WHEREAS, we share in the culpability of our nation, which pays for weapons and machinery that kill civilians, destroy homes, devastate medical infrastructure, and prevent aid from reaching those in desperate need of food and care.

WHEREAS, our faith as Christians and our beliefs as the United Church of Christ call us to express deep concern and urgently respond to the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We cannot and must not be silent.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

Joining with our UCC church leaders and partners, we call for an immediate, permanent ceasefire.

We call for the immediate release and the safe return of all hostages — Israelis, as well as Palestinians and others.

We condemn restrictions at Gaza border crossings to the flow of life-essential supplies.

We call for the resumption of funding and unlimited access for all humanitarian relief organizations, and for restoring the free flow of food, water, medical supplies, fuel, and other necessities of life to counter current levels of starvation and suffering.

We call for all actions in Gaza to be guided by the Geneva Convention and the International Court of Justice.

We call on our political leaders to cease funding for arms that cause death and injury and block aid.

We call for every decision to be grounded in a commitment to respect the rights and human dignity of all people, a just peace that Christ calls us to build.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

NOTES:

UCC Declaration for Just Peace Between Israel and Palestine <https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/General-Synod-2021-Resolution-I-P.pdf>

House Resolution Calling for Ceasefire

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-resolution/786/text>

UN Security Council Resolution for Ceasefire

<https://www.jns.org/full-text-un-security-council-resolution-2728/#:~:text=The%20U.N.%20Sec>

Affirming UCC as a Just Peace Church

<https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/just-peace-church-pronouncement-GS-15.pdf>

United Nations: Background and Clarification of “Genocide”

Application of the label “genocide” to Israel’s actions in Gaza is contested within the international community. The United Nations International Court of Justice concluded that the events in Gaza may “plausibly” constitute genocide (Jan 26, 2024); The Republic of South Africa, due to escalating violence and worsening conditions in Gaza, requested that provisional measures be applied to the conditions of genocide which it asserts are now occurring (Mar 6, 2024); The State of Israel rejected those charges of genocide in its response (Mar 24, 2024). Links to all three positions are included in the International Court of Justice Press Release (Mar 28, 2024). The issue has not yet been resolved.

According to the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, genocide is defined as: “...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

Killing members of the group;

Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Mount Hollywood UCC Resolution (December, 2023):

We understand the underlying causes of the siege of Gaza are both complex and simple, deep and ongoing,

We recognize the events of October 7th to be a profound and seemingly insurmountable violation,

We pray for the safety and return of the remaining hostages,

We regard Anti-Semitism as an ancient, ongoing, and widespread problem around the world, and Islamophobia as a threat to the thriving and well-being of our Muslim neighbors,

We bear witness to the killing by indiscriminate bombing of thousands of innocent civilians, including children, journalists, medical workers, etc. in Palestine. As people of faith, we cannot and must not be silent.

The violence and harm that continues to be done to the civilians of Gaza is unacceptable and we join with our UCC Church leaders and partners who are calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire.

Membership at IUCC

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

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

The next luncheon is scheduled for **June 2**. **If you are interested in attending, please contact iucc@iucc.org or pastorsarah@iucc.org**

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

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

-Renaey Boyum, Membership Ministry Chair



5/28	Jeffrey Gaskill	5/31	Terry LePage
5/24	Sarah Gilliland	5/23	Christian Murdy
5/23	Dave Hodges	5/19	Cindy O'Dell
5/23	Connie Jones	5/15	Dale Ramirez
5/07	Pam Kamps	5/29	Mark Rychnovsky
5/02	Nathaniel KeslerWest	5/26	Scott Rychnovsky
5/25	Jeannie Lee	5/05	Ron Steiner

Photos from Creativity Sunday



Photos courtesy of Renaey Boyum & Pastor Sarah

Legacy Circle



...ensuring our future



UPDATE - A public service announcement brought to you by your favorite Fund Development Committee:

For those of you who may still be procrastinating, the workshop series referenced below - It's Your Money and It's Your Estate (www.IYME.org) - has only just begun with regard to the Zoom workshops. You will have only missed the first of five sessions that was largely an overview. You still have plenty of time to take advantage of this impressive FREE seminar series. Some of the in-person workshops are further along in their series, but it would be easiest and most convenient just to attend via Zoom. This information is too good to miss. Check it out now before the next sessions begin on May 2 and May 3! Don't procrastinate any longer!



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

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

whose first webinar begins on April 26 and the other series webinar begins on April 25. There are five workshops in each series. In person workshops are present in Newport Beach, Brea, Orange, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Irvine, Huntington Beach, Mission Viejo, Fullerton, and Laguna Beach. So, there is an in person location near you. The earliest of these begins April 3, though the majority begin a couple of weeks later. Therefore, please be sure to check out the dates in your location ASAP to register for this free workshop series.

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

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

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

In earnest,
Duane Vajrt & Bill Lawrence
Fund Development committee co-chairs



LEGACY CIRCLE SCROLL

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

Much Fruit

by Dustin Nguyen, Youth Coordinator



This is the printed version of Dustin’s sermon preached on April 28th, PAAM Sunday, at Montebello-Plymouth Congregational Church, where he was the guest preacher.

Good morning. By the grace of God and the luck of the draw I got assigned to Montebello-Plymouth Congregational Church, which happens to be a sister church of my own church, Irvine United Congregational Church. And not long after I got hired as Youth Coordinator at IUCC, Pastor Mitchell came down to say hi. So I’m very thrilled to be your guest preacher today as we celebrate Pacific Islander and Asian American ministry and gear up for AAPI Heritage Month in May. It couldn’t be more appropriate on a day like this to have a preacher who combines the Eastern and Western sacred traditions. My journey in the church is unique in that I was evangelized by a Buddhist monk. I’ve tossed around several different labels. I could say that I’m both Buddhist and Christian. Or that I’m a Buddhist Christian or a Zen Christian. But what I call myself now is a Buddhist follower of Jesus. It sounds so much more powerful to me because that implies that following Jesus is an active choice I’m making, not a passive one. It also conveys the idea that you don’t necessarily have to be a Christian to follow Jesus. Hell, some *Christians* don’t even follow Jesus.

In today’s Gospel reading from John 15, the main point is discipleship. Jesus uses vibrant imagery, referring to himself as “the true vine” and saying that “those who abide in [him] and [he] in them bear much fruit.” On a spiritual level, it’s quite beautiful. Now, when it comes to growing fruit on a practical level, you’re going to need land and water. For many peoples throughout history,

there have been struggles for land and resources and self-determination.

Take Hawaii for example. Considering how many Hawaiian elements we have as part of today’s liturgy, and the fact that Pastor Mitchell is Hawaiian born-and-raised himself, I would be remiss to not talk about the colonization of Hawaii. You know, it’s wild to think about the role that fruit had in the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. I’m sure you’ve heard of the Dole Company. That fruit company. Well, the Dole family was one of the lead instigators of the coup to depose Queen Lili’uokalani, the last monarch of Hawaii, and to establish a new government that would be sympathetic to the economic interests of the colonizers. Today, the lands and waters belonging to the Hawaiian people have been taken for military bases, resorts, and plantations. It’s gotten to a point where it’s now too expensive for Native Hawaiians to even live on their own homeland. According to the American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. census bureau, there are now more Native Hawaiians living in the continental U.S. than in Hawaii itself. Hawaii has turned into a playground and paradise for wealthy settlers. Colonialism along with climate change had a huge part also in the 2023 wildfires that scorched Maui. When American sugar barons came and built their plantations, they introduced a lot of nonnative plant species that were highly flammable. That, coupled with land mismanagement, disruption of the water supply, and climate change resulted in an absolutely catastrophic wildfire.

Land and water have also been important in the story of my people, the Vietnamese people. Since the very

beginning, our fate has been tied to the land and water. In the Vietnamese creation myth, it is said that we Vietnamese are descendants of a sea dragon king and a mountain fairy. And in the Vietnamese language, the word for water, “nuoc,” also means nation. In its history, Vietnam was invaded by one country after another. It began with 1,000 years of Chinese occupation. Then came the French in the 19th century. Like with the American colonizers of Hawaii, the French also had economic reasons for seizing Vietnam. Vietnam had abundant natural resources—fruits, you could say—to exploit, coupled with the fact that it was strategically located and would provide access to trade routes and markets in Asia. However, the French occupation was brutal. Vietnamese under French colonial rule faced violence, land confiscation, forced labor, heavy taxation, military conscription, and cultural erasure. This colonial strife radicalized Ho Chi Minh, and the rest is history. When WW2 came around, the Empire of Japan thrust itself into the picture, becoming another occupying force. Japanese occupation strained the food supply and distribution networks. That, coupled with severe natural disasters which devastated crops led to the Great Famine of 1945, which killed an estimated 1-2 million Vietnamese.

Now, I’ve taken you on a pretty wild ride so far. Somehow I’ve turned a lesson about fruit and vines into a sermon about Hawaiian and Vietnamese colonization. The reality is these issues are interrelated. It’s the same imperial machine that is desecrating the dignity of human life and of God’s creation. This is why I must also talk about Palestine. These are not separate issues.

The Palestinian American academic, Edward Said, in his 1978 book, “Orientalism,” describes orientalism as a set of stereotypes depicting the East as mysterious, inferior, backward, and needing subjugation by the civilized West. This lens that paints all Arabs as barbaric terrorists is the same lens that paints all Asians as yellow peril. Which is why, as we gear up to celebrate AAPI Heritage Month, let’s also recognize how we’re interconnected with other communities outside of the AAPI community. Our liberation is intertwined with one another’s. To call back to Hawaii, the Hawaii State Legislature has just adopted a resolution calling for a permanent ceasefire, release of all hostages, flow of humanitarian aid, and peace negotiations. This is the intercommunity solidarity that I’m talking about. If you want to see more examples of intercommunity solidarity, look at the ongoing campus

protests to end the slaughter in Gaza. These protests are multiethnic and multi-faith, and yes, that includes Jews who are speaking out against the slaughter of Palestinians, saying “Never again means never again—for anyone.” In a moment such as this, what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? A colleague of mine in the Episcopal Church, who is pursuing ordination and is currently an Mdiv student at Yale Divinity School, has been active in the Yale campus protests with other divinity students. She has been arrested and faces discipline from the school for speaking out about the more than 30,000 killed by Israel’s bombardment, financed by American tax dollars. Calling back to what I said at the beginning about being a Buddhist follower of Jesus, there’s a difference between following Jesus and following an empire religion. I don’t follow that empire religion that Christianity became; I follow Jesus, who was a marginalized, imperial subject. I follow Jesus, who was a Palestinian Jew. I follow Jesus who was a holy troublemaker on behalf of all oppressed peoples. In the Christian calendar, we’re in the season of Eastertide, and you might wonder where is Easter in a world so full of violence and death.

Let’s look back to what Jesus says in John 15. “Abide in me as I abide in you.” Jesus is saying let’s co-create a more just world together. In that same chapter, Jesus also says, “I do not call you my servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you my friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” Jesus, despite being God, is not positioning himself as lord over his subjects, but as an equal alongside us. A friend. A fellow compatriot in the struggle. So friends, let us go into this broken world we call home—this world where the vines of fate tie all of us together. Let us be breakers of the cycle and repairers of the breach and bring life to the valleys of the shadow of death, until the scorched earth bears fruit once more. Can I get an amen from the church?

Bards & Dragons

by Dustin Nguyen, Youth Coordinator

On April 19th, the young adults celebrated William Shakespeare's birthday with a Shakespearean-themed Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) game, aptly titled "Bards and Dragons." But Dungeons and Dragons is more than just a game; it's a journey into realms of imagination where anything is possible. Created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in the early 1970s, D&D has since captured the hearts and minds of millions worldwide, evolving into a cultural phenomenon that continues to thrive today.

At its core, D&D is a tabletop role-playing game where players assume the roles of fantastical characters embarking on epic adventures in a world crafted by a Dungeon Master (DM). The DM acts as both narrator and referee, guiding the players through a narrative while also controlling the myriad creatures, challenges, and environments they encounter. For "Bards and Dragons," the story was set in an alternate version of Elizabethan England in which monsters and magic exist.

The heart of D&D lies in its storytelling and collaborative world-building. Players create characters of various races, classes, and backgrounds, each with their own unique abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Whether you're a courageous knight, a cunning rogue, a wise wizard, or anything in between, D&D offers the freedom to become anyone and do anything within the bounds of imagination. The gameplay unfolds through a combination of structured

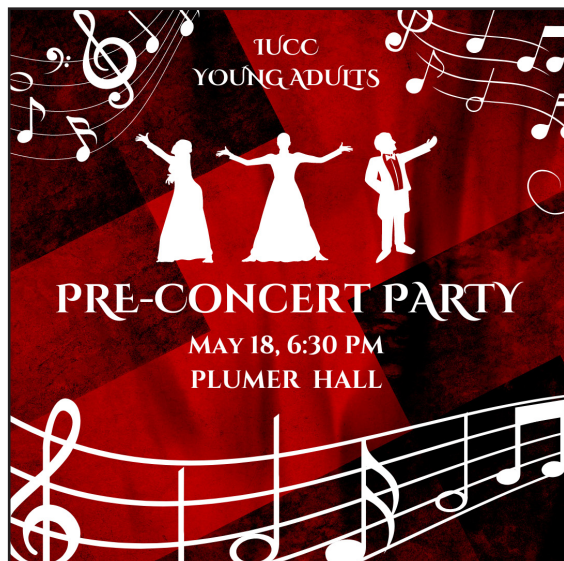
rules and boundless creativity. Players roll dice to determine the outcomes of their actions, whether it's swinging a sword in combat, casting a spell, or attempting to pick a lock. These dice rolls, coupled with the characters' abilities and the DM's narration, shape the unfolding narrative, leading to unexpected twists, heroic victories, and sometimes, tragic defeats.

One of the most compelling aspects of D&D is its emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. Players must strategize, communicate, and rely on each other's strengths to overcome challenges and achieve their goals. A hilarious plot point of "Bards and Dragons" was that the players needed to work together to mount a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Many mishaps would happen along the way, such as characters getting into accidents, a bear going on the rampage, the theater catching on fire, and the players would have to think of creative tactics to surmount their problems.



Beyond its gameplay mechanics, D&D serves as a gateway to creativity, critical thinking, and social interaction. It encourages players to think outside the box, solve problems creatively, and explore complex moral dilemmas within a safe and supportive environment.

In a world where technology often dominates our leisure time, D&D stands as a testament to the enduring power of face-to-face interaction and communal storytelling. Whether you're a seasoned veteran or a newcomer eager to embark on your first adventure, D&D welcomes all who dare to dream and embark on an unforgettable journey through the realms of imagination.



Mama

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



Her name was Swanhild Helena Hopland Mattson. Friends and relatives called her Swanee. I called her Mama.

I was one of those supremely fortunate children whose mama not only gave birth but also supplied consistent loving care. In my childhood, every day could have been called Mother's Day because of mama's

steady presence. In my life there was no such thing as an absent mother, or a too busy mother, or an abusive mother. She wasn't the hovering kind, but she was a mama who was available. Every day.

Mama liked surprises. May first, designated as May Day, was a day of surprises in our neighborhood. Children delivered baskets of goodies and flowers to the front doors of their friends, as well as to the elderly and the sick. Then they ran away like puppies on steroids so the occupant wouldn't know who the giver was. Mama relished the fun and excitement that the secret baskets provided.

In Mama's mind, only homemade baskets made by the two of us would do. I watched as she went to the kitchen cupboard and pulled out several empty oatmeal boxes. Those round cardboard containers were cut down to make baskets of about 6 inches in diameter and five inches high. We made handles out of the leftover cardboard and attached them with tape to the edges of the basket tops.

Then, and this was the best part in my eyes, I was the designated decorator. I took this job very seriously, making flowers out of colored construction paper and carefully at-

taching them with paste to the sides of the baskets. Mama said they were beautiful, her chosen word for the highest praise.

To fill the baskets, Mama and I made peanut butter cookies. It was my job to make the crisscross marks on the cookie tops with a fork dipped in flour. Mama said I did a beautiful job.

Next, Mama took me by the hand and we walked around our yard to pick flowers to add to the baskets. Pansies,

bleeding hearts, and crocus -- all bloomed in spring in Minnesota so that's what we found. I tucked the cut flowers in the baskets beside the cookies. Mama said she couldn't have done it as beautifully as I. That was high praise for a little girl.



Finished, the baskets stood in a row on our Formica and Chrome kitchen table. Mama and I stood back and surveyed our work, declaring the May Day baskets beautiful. We put them in my red wagon and walked together to bring them to our neighbors. I hurriedly placed a basket at each door, then raced back to mother. It was so much fun that we giggled with glee all the way home.

This is just one story of Mama's presence in my life. Though she was a good mama, she wasn't perfect. Since her opportunities as a woman had been limited, I think she believed that mine would be as well. I don't recall her urging me on to bigger things. Her main expectation of me was that I be a kind, caring human being. Like her.

This year, as we celebrate Mother's Day, I'll remember a woman named Swanee, my imperfect yet ever-present mama, who lovingly cared for her daughter.

SAVE THE DATES

Wednesdays, May 15, 22 & 29, 7-8:30 p.m.



Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge

EXISTENTIALISM COMES TO IUCC

- The beautiful symmetry with progressive Christianity
- Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Camus, de Beauvoir, Dostoevsky, Frenkl & theologian Paul Tillich
- Radical personal freedom within given parameters
- Personal responsibility to create your own life, meaning, and purpose
- Personal authenticity and self-transcendence
- Paradox and irony - important in looking at life & theology
- Joy, affirming life
- Kiergaard's leap of faith
- JERRY WILL SHARE HOW EXISTENTIALISM GETS HIM THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES

A different kind of church, an independent-thinking church

At IUCC, we don't want to be told what to think and do, which takes place in many churches.

Existentialism and progressive Christianity have a surprising synchronicity. Both see learning and truth as subjective, something we figure out on our own spiritual journey, rather than someone else giving us what they think is a guideline.

Just as CRT (Critical Race Theory) provides a lens of race to look at societal structures, existentialism provides a lens to look at our human existence, in all of its ramification, all the way down to our everyday lives.

HONORING SUSAN SAYRE

by Carol Smith

(reprinted with permission from the author)



Susan Sayre is soon to be honored by the City of Irvine as a Distinguished Citizen "for her significant contributions to the betterment of the city and selfless dedication to the democratic process within the community." Her nomination has been approved by the Irvine City Council and her name will appear on the Wall of Recognition at City Hall.

With the mission of informing and empowering the citizens of Irvine, Susan co-founded and writes for the *Irvine Watchdog* and contributed occasionally to the *Voice of OC*, an independent, nonprofit online newsletter. She regularly attends the meetings of the Irvine City Council, the Great Park Board, and the City Planning and Transportation Commission providing wise counsel during the public comment sessions. She is well respected by the City Council, Great Park Board, and Planning Commission and staff members.

Susan comes to this honor with an impressive civic engagement background. She came to Irvine in 1969 to be employed with the UCI Libraries Government Publications Department. She graduated from Western State College of Law and worked as a legal assistant for the County until passing the California Bar.

Susan began her career with the County of Orange in 1983 and became a Senior Social Worker for the Adult Protective Services Division of the Social Services Agency investigating, mediating, and resolving allegations of abuse and neglect of senior and disabled adults.

She has put in many volunteer hours with organizations such as Planned Parenthood, Families Forward, and the League of Women Voters.

Her current focus is advocating for environmental policies, the Veteran's Memorial Park, and ultimately, a community where those who work and retire in the City can afford to live in an accessible, ADA-adaptable, walkable, and bike friendly community.

A reception for the City of Irvine's 2024 Distinguished Citizens will be held at City Hall on June 11, 2024.



Existentialism Supports and Enhances Progressive Christianity

by the Reverend Doctor Jerry von Talge

Like CRT (Critical Race Theory) provides the lens of race to look at societal structures, existentialism gives us a lens to look at our human existence in all of its ramifications including our everyday lives.

The Core Values of Progressive Christianity - we...

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 perspective, 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 lifelong learning, believing there is more value in questioning than in absoluteness.*

We are a progressive church, and we follow the basic beliefs of progressive Christianity. This is an important statement to make because it identifies how we see our individual and community journeys of faith. The five core values (above), express how we do church and the dynamics of our individual and community faith. We desire to follow Jesus, seek community, strive for peace and justice, embraces the best insights of modern science, strive to protect the earth, and commit to a path of lifelong learning believing there is more value in questioning than in absolutes.

Progressive Christianity is an open-ended, ongoing search for truth, which can be seen through the lens of existentialism, along with the life and teaching of Jesus. We acknowledge that there are many paths that lead to spiritual reality, but we choose a Jesus-centered faith. Existentialism is a loose body of ideas that has amazing synchronicity with progressive Christianity. Both see truth as subjective, to be found through seeking, rather than accepting fixed, dogmatic expressions of reality. Doctrines and creeds tend to be absolutes and discourage seeking truth, growing in faith, and having doubts.

Value #2 of progressive Christianity is seeking community which is diverse and inclusive. Both Sartre and de Beauvoir emphasized the importance of social justice, which is primarily community-based (Value #3). Value #5 is a commitment to lifelong learning, with more value in questioning than in absolutes. This is one of the greatest points of synchronicity between existentialism and progressive Christianity.

Existentialism enhances progressive Christianity by adding passion and an affirmation of life that is seen in Frederick Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return - taking the same life to live back over again without changing any of its details I see this concept of eternal return to be the greatest affirmation in life, second only to Beethoven's Ode To Joy. Various existential writers (especially Sartre) have talked about hope. The ultimate conveyer of hope is Viktor Frankl, who survived Nazis death camps in WWII. He talked about one absolute – no matter what, there is always freedom to choose how we shall respond.

For the purposes of this article, the last enhancement, not only to progressive Christianity, but to our understanding of life overall, has to do with Camus' category of the absurd. We see in Camus the tendency of many existential philosophers to go too far, so we may want to dial back on them a bit. Camus said that life is absurd because life does not give humankind the answers regarding human existence that we seek. Kierkegaard said that some of life is absurd but not all. When something is absurd it doesn't make sense, it is non rational. There's no logical understanding. It can neither be understood nor explained. Non-rational cousins are paradox and irony. Something is paradoxical because the elements seem contradictory. Irony brings something different than expected. The categories of paradox and irony are important because once we realize that something is non rational and can't be explained we don't go chasing down rabbit holes.

IUCC is a different kind of church - a church where independent thinking is prized. Some churches tell people what to think and how to act. At IUCC, each of us takes full responsibility for our own thinking and our own actions. That's what it means to be a progressive Christian. And this approach to life is both supported and enhanced by existentialism.