

Newsletter May 2009
From the Pastor

Our United Church of Christ's "National Disaster Ministries" have prepared resources relevant to the outbreak of the Swine Flu. This is a reality now in our midst, and we can take simple measures to protect ourselves without panicking.

With nearly one hundred confirmed cases in ten states as of April 30, it is important for us to be vigilant. As government agencies ramp-up efforts to produce a vaccine, hygienic measures are currently the best means of preventing the spread of disease.

Here in Irvine, we appear relatively safe so far, and you may wonder why I am leading off with an article on Swine Flu. After all, I am not one prone to worrying about germs. I stand at the door each week and shake two hundred hands and I very rarely catch even a cold.

However, I believe that as members of "the beloved community" we owe it to ourselves to take measures to protect our church family.

From our National Church House, UCC church members have been urged to be vigilant about helping children in Sunday school classes keep clean, encouraging the use of frequent hand washing and alcohol-based hand sanitizers. It is also suggested that the "passing of the peace" in worship services be a verbal greeting only. For IUCC, that might translate to how we join together for the closing, "Alleluia." If someone near you does not want to hold your hand, please don't be offended!

Florence Coppola, the UCC's executive for National Disaster Ministries, says congregations can prepare for a pandemic by developing "alternative" ways of checking on one another and "identifying those in the congregation who have health issues or ongoing treatment and medical needs that will increase their vulnerability or exposure."

Congregational preparation also includes helping individual members assess their particular situation and decide how their needs would be met during a major service disruption.

Beginning this Sunday, and for as long as this flu virus is active, Communion will be served differently. Rather than pulling a piece of bread from a common loaf, there will be wafers. And, at second service where we need two stations, I will be holding a cup with real wine (alcohol kills germs) and the Rev. Ernie will have grape juice. Just take a wafer and dip it into the cup. If you do not want wine, let me know and I will have grape juice on hand.

Additionally, a newer member has opened my eyes to an allergy concern. In wheat, rye, barley and low level oats, there is a rubbery like protein called gluten. This substance is what helps the dough bind, which you would see with baked breads and other baked foods. Although these grains contain gluten, which can cause a gluten allergy in sensitive people, they also contain a number of other proteins that can also cause allergy symptoms. While I was buying the Communion wafers, I also purchased a supply of "gluten free" wafers. Even after we return to the use of real bread, there will be a supply of gluten-free wafers for any of you who have this particular allergy.

Again, I am one who does not worry too much about germs...but I am concerned that you know that we are taking every precaution to protect our community.

Besides which, I want to see you in church on Sunday! There is so much coming our way in the weeks ahead...Big Sunday, Mothers Day, The AIDS Walk, Sister Helen Prejean, and Michael Dowd, author of "Thank God for Evolution."

Furthermore, the Rev. Ken Wyant is taking a larger role in our congregation. Not only does he preach for me when I am gone, (to great reviews when I get back) he is beginning to

teach a class on three Thursday nights on the Book of Revelation. Choir-mates should consider driving in with their singing-spouses on rehearsal nights! So...I want you well and involved!



Carl and I just got back from San Francisco, where we took a couple days to relax... which we did by attending events at Grace Cathedral, including labyrinth walks and Sunday service. My real purpose in being there was to spend two days in Berkeley interviewing M.Div candidates at the Pacific School of Religion in order to pass on profiles of exceptional candidates to our search committee, whose wisdom and discernment I will rely upon greatly. You should know that our search committee finished the church profile in a month! We are ready now to move ahead and receive just the right person who is out there waiting to serve this congregation with me and alongside our terrific staff. I am so excited about providing this congregation with a full-time pastor to help grow our young families, and to free Robinmarie to bring more programs, adult education and speakers of note to IUCC.

Last year at this time, I was thinking, "Well...summer is coming...time to relax a little." It didn't happen. And I'm sure this summer will be no different. Look for family potlucks, small group gatherings, classes and fellowship...in the name of the God we serve.

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Paul