

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



In 2009 developed the concept of Planetary Boundaries. In this model, scientists view the earth as a vast system of systems—the interaction of land, ocean, atmosphere, and life—that make up the Earth System. Nine “boundaries” represent specific systems and processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth System as whole.

These boundaries also represent limits that, if transgressed, increase the risk of making the earth less hospitable for human habitation. According to lead author, Professor Will Steffen, “Transgressing a boundary increases the risk that human activities could inadvertently drive the Earth System into a much less hospitable state, damaging efforts to reduce poverty and leading to a deterioration of human well-being in many parts of the world, including wealthy countries.”

According to the eighteen international scientists that conducted the latest research, humans have now transgressed four of the nine boundaries: climate change, biosphere integrity, land systems, and biogeochemical cycles. Scientists consider two of these boundaries, climate change and biosphere integrity, to be “core boundaries.” Significantly altering either of these “core boundaries” is particularly alarming.

In January of this year, the *Journal Science* published the latest findings of the University of Stockholm’s Stockholm Resilience Center, a research institute that

With climate change, the earth has now surpassed the 390 parts per million CO₂ mark in the atmosphere. For the entire month of March, the earth averaged over 400 ppm. Preindustrial levels were 280 ppm, and scientists warn that we must reduce CO₂ to 350 ppm. We have also reached a point where loss of summer polar sea ice is almost certainly irreversible, which could help drive the Earth System to a warmer state and contribute to sea level rise. Scientists question how long we can remain over this boundary before large, irreversible changes become unavoidable, changes that produce major threats to human well-being.

Loss of biosphere integrity includes the mass extinction of species currently occurring throughout the earth, and the loss of biodiversity through the wholesale destruction of eco-systems, particularly forests. The main drivers pushing the loss of biosphere integrity are the human demand for food, water and natural resources, driven by high consumption levels in the rich developed countries, and by rapidly expanding middle classes in nations like Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa.

With regard to land systems, humans are “developing” land by converting it to human use all over the planet. These lands include forests, grasslands, wetlands and other vegetation types. Again, the loss of forests is of particular concern because forest destruction increases species extinction, and by removing forests from the face of the earth we remove important carbon sinks that soak up atmospheric carbon.

Finally, humans have significantly altered the biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorous, mainly as a result of industrial and agricultural processes. Of particular concern is the increasingly heavy use of fertilizer in industrial agricultural production and the impact this has on soil. Furthermore, a significant amount of human-applied nitrogen and phosphorous ends up in the earth's waterways and oceans, pushing marine and aquatic systems across ecological thresholds of their own.

Last month, I shared three different theological or spiritual models from which Christians can draw to respond to our growing ecological and climate change challenges. All three models—Creation Care, Eco-Justice, and Eco-Spirituality—can provide resources to us as we reflect on our response to our troubled relationship with the earth. This month, on June 14th, Chris Searles, a long-time environmental activist, will offer a presentation to our church that addresses a number of the boundary-transgressing issues outlined above.

In particular, he'll address the loss of biodiversity and species extinction, with an emphasis on tropical forests. And he'll share with us how people around the globe are making the concerted effort to preserve forests in an attempt to address biodiversity and species extinction, and to maintain each forest's vitally important function as a carbon sink. Most importantly, he'll offer us an opportunity to participate in these efforts. I've seen his presentation twice, and besides being very informative, it's both disturbing and hope-inducing. I hope you can make it on June 14.

Church Leadership

Trustee Co-Chairs	Don Brown & Bill Campbell
Deacons Chair	Janet Parsons
Outreach Team	Reuel Nash & John Goff
Moderator Co-Chairs	Barbara Burnham & Bill Beardall
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Christian Education	Rachel Dietz
Coordinators	John Burlinson
Clerk	Betty Bodman
Historian	Pat & Mel Oakes
Web mistress	Sara Ross
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Personals

by Pat Oakes

Alex VandeStadt graduated from **Trinity University** on **Saturday, May 16**, and then enjoyed a few days with **Robin** and **Tom** in **Port Aransas**. She'll be hitting the books again very soon, beginning her work on a **Master's degree** in **Education** at Trinity in mid-June. Congratulations, Alex—and to Robin and Tom, too!



5/16/15 Alex VandeStadt with her proud mom, Robin Chapman

Liz and **Reuel Nash** have had some wonderful experiences in **Spain** recently. Liz left on **April 13** to walk from **Leon** to **Santiago de Compostela, Spain**, on the **Camino de Santiago** (the pilgrimage to the traditional burial place of St. James that thousands of pilgrims walk each year from many starting points) with friend **Cindy Locke** (who has traveled with our group to El Salvador). That trip of just under 200 miles on part of the "French Camino" took a little over 2 weeks. They met great folks from Spain, Australia, Germany, Canada, Sweden, Mexico, and other places; had lots of practice dealing with sore feet and blisters; and had an experience far beyond what can be described here, culminating with the moving **Peregrino (Pilgrim) Mass** in the Cathedral in Santiago after arriving in town the day before soaking wet from walking in the rain for several hours. Then Reuel and Cindy's husband **Bill** joined them for a week traveling through **Granada, Cordoba, and Sevilla**, touring that part of Spain once ruled by the Moors with the later terrible history of



5/15 The Smiles International surgical group in Cabo San Lucas. Debby is in the middle row, third from the right.

the Inquisition, seeing the mix of Islam and later Spanish Catholicism—and a fabulous flamenco performance. Reuel and Liz went on to the ocean at **Cadiz**, the historic town of **Arcos**, the **Andalusian** horses of **Jerez**, and several great days in **Barcelona** before coming home on **May 17**.

Debby Kohrt, a nurse (and mom to **Kristen Parkhill**), recently returned from **Cabo San Lucas, Mexico**, as part of a group of 18 folks including **Dr. Jeffrey Moses**, president and founder of **Smiles International Foundation** which was formed in 1987. The doctors and nurses work with children who need surgeries to correct problems like cleft palates, etc. Rotary International helps with supplies and expenses. Debby was delighted to make her second trip to Cabo and is looking forward to her third one in October. One thing that makes the trips special besides being able to help the children is that two dear friends from her days at **Denver Children's Hospital** in 1975 also go along. If you would like more information about Smiles International, go to

<http://smilesinternationalfoundation.org>

Ruth Koenig reports, "On **May 19**, I traded in a left 1927 shoulder for a new model. The surgery went well and I have a new respect for one-armed people since the left arm is virtually not there and feeling is only now beginning to return. I am wearing a sling to immobilize my left arm and hand, but things are go-

ing very well. I am being well-cared for at the John and Barbara Koenig rehabilitation facility where the food and room service are excellent. The resident therapist (**Annie Oakley Koenig** aka **Oakley** or **Oakley the Dog**) has been ever vigilant in watching over me."

It was a great joy to see **Heather** and **Zach Lytle** in church on **Mother's Day**. They wanted to share with us the happy news of the safe arrival of **Abigail Rosemary** on **April 29**. She was **10 pounds** even and **21.75 inches** long. She is as sweet as can be and they are happy to have the hustle and bustle of a little one back in their lives. Heather says, "We are still so grateful for all of the support of the church over the past difficult year. Hopefully Abi will be following in **Roger's** footsteps and coming to Austin to be baptized sometime in the early fall. I look back on that special day with such fondness." We will all look forward to that celebration.



4/29/15 Brand-new **Abigail Rosemary** with her parents **Zach** and **Heather Lytle**

Nodie and **Dennis Murphy** are pleased to share that their son **Ben** and his wife **Faye** are expecting a **baby boy** in **October**. Ben is based at **Fort Drum** in upstate **New York**.

Joe McMillan had a great four days in **D.C.** over **Mother's Day** weekend. He was there to celebrate his **50th class reunion** with classmates and friends from his days at **Howard University**. He marched with the graduating class and had a wonderful time catching up with old friends. He also reports that his home in Austin is pretty much back in order and that there have been no problems with the recent rains.



5/10/15 Bibles were presented to 4 Sunday school students (2 sets of twins!) on **Mother's Day**.

L-R: **Scarlett Quisenberry**, **John Dietz**, **Francesca Dietz**, and **Juliet Quisenberry**

On **May 10**, the **Deacons**, as one of their favorite duties, presented four of our children with their first **Bibles**. **Jaime Hadley** had arranged that each of their names be printed inside. Traditionally, children receive their Bibles when they are finishing the third grade. This year the four children comprised two sets of twins: **Juliet** and **Scarlett Quisenberry** (Casis Elementary), and **John** and **Francesca Dietz** (Gullett Elementary). Given the over 100-year history of the church, and acknowledging there was no proof, **Ruth Koenig** made the claim that this was probably the first time that two sets of twins were given Bibles on the same day, thus making it an historic event. In another Deacon tradition, Ruth shared a favorite Bible verse: **Micah 6:8**, one particularly familiar and significant in the life of our church. She pointed out that the first part of it, about **"doing justice"** is tricky because it is not just about ourselves, but requires us to help people achieve justice who are often powerless to do it for themselves. Love and kindness are not really loving or kind if they are not also **"fair"** and **"just."**

Marilyn Gaddis and **George Carruthers** flew to **Southern California** on **April 30th** to attend Marilyn's **65th Pomona College Reunion Weekend!** Unfortunately, only four of Marilyn's classmates could join her for the lectures, wine tasting, meals, and concerts. Before flying back to Austin, Marilyn's family gathered for a **"Sharing of Memories"** honoring her youngest brother who died in December.

Heart of Texas Association News

June

by Liz Nash

The 52nd Annual Meeting of the South Central Conference will be held June 5th to 7th at the New Orleans Marriott at the Convention Center, hosted by the New Orleans Association. The theme focuses on new life and spirit in the church, with the Rev. Michael Piazza as the keynote speaker. Michael Piazza is the co-director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, a group that has provided support for new church starts, renewing churches, pastors, and churches seeking excellent resources. He is also the Senior Pastor of Virginia-Highland Church in Atlanta and was the Senior Pastor and Dean of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas for many years. The meeting promises to provide inspiration for a vibrant vision and faith for our churches. I hope that our Heart of Texas churches will tap into the resources and energy that those who attend bring back. And time in New Orleans is always a great thing!

At our Annual Meeting and throughout the month, we will be saying goodbye and offering profound thanks to Douglas Anders, our Conference Minister who is retiring in mid July. Douglas will preach on Sunday at Annual Meeting, and we will engage in a farewell liturgy for him. Our Association pastors will be meeting with Douglas at our June "Jam and Bread" on the second Tuesday of June at St. John's UCC clergy gathering for a time of reflecting, reminiscing, and farewell. Douglas has provided strong, very faithful, and excellent leadership to our Conference. I began as the Brazos Association Minister just before he began his ministry with us. He has been a joy to work with -- always available when needed, supportive, direct, and honest with his wise counsel. Those of us who have worked with him will miss him, but also look forward to the future with hope and faith in what God is calling us to as churches in Christian covenant in the South Central Conference.

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ will be held June 26-30 in Cleveland, Ohio, the home of the National UCC. Our Heart of Texas Association delegates are Gerry Metzger, pastor of Bethany Congregational in San Antonio; Sheila Angerer of Faith UCC in New Braunfels; Marianne Muehr of Weimar UCC; and me. Our delegates this year include those elected from the former South Texas and Brazos Associations -- in the future we will have fewer delegates as the terms of those elected from the two associations expire. As always, we have a number of resolutions to consider, listed at <http://synod.uccpages.org/resolutions/index.html>. We will also be voting on the nomination of the Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer to become the next General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, replacing the Rev. Geoffrey Black, who is retiring. An introduction to Rev. Dr. Dorhauer can be found at <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/Notice-to-the-Board-of-Directors-of-Feb-13-2015.pdf>. Those of us who are going will look forward to sharing the events and decisions of General Synod with our Association.

Blessings in Christ

Liz Nash

Heart of Texas Association Minister

Pam Tucker has been diagnosed with and is being treated for breast cancer. Her treatments are every two weeks if her body can tolerate it. Normally it is every three weeks, but Pam would rather get it finished. The second one was worse than the first in terms of feeling bad and not recovering as quickly or fully, but this is to be expected. There are eight total chemo treatments: four of one type and four of another. Although Pam hates to spend time on fashion and accessorizing, she is having some fun fixing different head coverings adorned with different materials, scarves, wraps, beads, ties, and chains (as in necklaces!). Who would have guessed? Her partner **Alison** is tremendously supportive and works hard to feed her healthy food—this is always true, but especially now. Pam owns her company, so she is working as she can and her wonderful employees are doing what they can to help. **Savanna** and **Harrison** are a little worried, but seem to be doing all right. The prognosis is that Pam will be cancer-free, but she has a 12% chance of it coming back within 10 years. Twelve percent is higher than Pam would like, but she's focusing on the cancer-free part for now and feeling very fortunate. Pam notes that she couldn't have better support from family and friends including her many church friends.

Fran and **Rambie Briggs'** granddaughter **Margit** has come for a long visit beginning **May 22**. She graduated from **UNC-Asheville** and is taking some time before looking for work this summer. She is coming here from **Tucson** after a visit with her **Uncle Stephen Russell**. Her senior art show was a great success. She was very pleased to have sold 6 of her paintings.



5/15 Stephen Russell with his niece Margit Briggs in Phoenix

It was a very nice surprise to see **Hannah Norton** at church on the **17th**. She was in town for a conference from **Gainesville, Florida**. She was a wonderful part of our choir while she finished graduate school. On Sunday, she was in charge of the conference breakfast so did not have time to come and rehearse with the choir, but everyone was delighted to see her back in town, if only for a very short time.



5/17/15 Hannah Norton visited from Gainesville, FL

Lynne Lemley reports in her own inimitable style: "**Jeff** graduated **May 15** from **Texas A&M School of Architecture**. (He graduated *Magna cum laude*, by the way; I am an overly proud mamma). He is immediately off to **University of Houston** for a 2-year Master's program. The ceremony took place in A & M's big ol' indoor sports arena, and let me just advise those of our congregation who may eventually attend any A & M graduation in that arena that it is FREEZING COLD in there, & the ceremony will last about 3 hrs: bring jackets & something to do; I am SO serious.

A&M people tend to treat each other like they're in one huge fraternity/sorority, so it was an emotional and bonding graduation experience. I am actually very pleased that Jeff wound up attending A&M; has been pretty much the perfect fit for him. **Katie** will graduate **June 5** from **Westwood High School** in the **Cedar Park Center**—at 8:00 am! Her summer & future plans include: finally getting her driver's license!; forcing her brother & **Allison** at some point to take her and 2 of her Indian friends Arpetha & Cimrin on a senior trip to the beaches east of Pensacola; at some point getting her first job; getting some of her undergraduate requirements out of the way at **ACC**—she will probably be a future transfer student to either Texas A&M, Texas Tech, or UT."

Florence Castle celebrated her **99th birthday** with a few friends at her home on **May 13th**. She entertained the guests by playing a few numbers on the piano which she brought to Austin when she moved here in the 1940s.



5/13/15 Paul Castle with his mother Florence on her 99th birthday

The **Women's Book Club** used the opportunity provided by the Alice in Wonderland exhibit at the Ransom Center to choose **The Annotated Alice** by Martin Gardner for their May book. It included the original text for **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** and **Through The Looking Glass** along with lots of notes to help make the reading of the books more understandable to modern readers. The group enjoyed the exhibit very much—especially the many illustrations and the foreign translations. They adjourned to an excellent Thai restaurant across the street for lunch and further conversation about the book.



5/20/15 The Women's Book Club had a great outing to the Alice in Wonderland exhibit at the Ransom Center on the UT campus. Enjoying the exhibit were Barbara Burnham, Pat Oakes, Nodie Murphy (with knee problems), Betty Bodman, Lynne Lemley, and Geneva Ross

Betsy Russell sent an update on the Russell family : Bethany and her husband **Joseph Baker** are active in the theatre scene in the **Burlington, NC,** area where she teaches drama in **The Burlington School**. They are all proud of her daughter **Margit Briggs** who graduated with a BFA from UNC-Asheville (the UNC system's liberal arts college) on Mother's Day weekend. Their son **Stephen**, now at the **University of Arizona**, has accepted a new position in the **Department of Human Development and Family Sciences** at the **University of Texas in Austin**. He will be the **Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor in Child Development**. He and **Scott Neeley**, his partner of 22 years to whom he was married this past December, will move to Austin in **August**.

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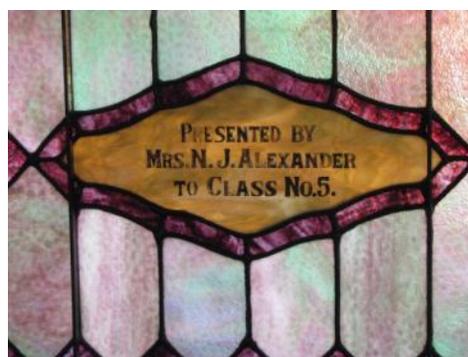
Return Service Requested

July Visitor Deadline—June 25, 2015

After 18 years in the **Denver/Boulder** area, **Amy** and her husband **Michael Finch** moved to **Asheville** in 2013 with their children **Emma** (14) and **Ben** (12). She sees patients, instructs residents, and serves as **Medical Director** at the **Mountain Area Health Education Center** in Asheville. **Rollin** and **Betsy** continue to enjoy their retirement in **Hillsborough, NC**.

Mel and **Pat Oakes** have had a very busy month of travels and are happy to be home for a while. They enjoyed 8 days in **D.C.** with **Sarah** and **Joe** after **Mardie** and her son **Durham** were in Austin for a week. They were home for less than 2 weeks before they went to **San Francisco** for 8 days--mainly to celebrate **Durham's 3rd birthday**, but also for Pat and (mostly) Mel to work on projects on **Mardie** and **Tony's** house, which is still a work in progress. Four days after getting home from SF, Pat flew to **LA** to meet her 2 sisters who were coming from **NY** and **NC**. The 3 were met by their brother whose only child **Kelly** was getting married in **Malibu**. The 4 siblings had a wonderful time together, the wedding was lovely and the surroundings, right on the beach, were gorgeous!

History Corner by Pat and Mel Oakes



9/21/14 Last medallion in the back on the pulpit side--presented by Mrs. N.J.

The "**Mrs. N. J. Alexander**" referred to in the church window at the back on the pulpit side is a second wife of **Newton J. Alexander**. Newton, a pharmacist in Austin, married

Lula May Rosengren in 1887. She was seventeen and he was forty-four. Lula Alexander was obviously very active in the church as she dedicated four windows to the 5th Class. The other 3 windows from her are in the fellowship hall. It is believed that the numbers listed on some of the old windows relate to Sunday school class years after the formation of the church in 1901--so we think that class number five would have been a class in **1906**. If you would like to learn more about Lula Alexander or her husband Newton, check out what Mel Oakes has learned at:

<http://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/ccahistory/CongregationalChurchofAustinHistory/Mrs.N.J.AlexanderWindow.html>