

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin **United Church of Christ**

408 West Twenty-third Street, Austin, Texas 78705-5214

(512) 472-2370 Fax: (512) 472-1175

E-mail: ucausti@swbell.net

Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



This Lenten season, we will once again begin our Sunday morning worship service with a period of silence. While I know that some of you do not like sitting in silence, or feel uncomfortable with silence, many of you have told me you very much appreciate this silent time. Some of you have taken a keen interest in a spirituality of silence. If you feel uncomfortable with silence, or if you appreciate it and would like to deepen your spiritual practice of silence, I'm available to talk to you about it. This month, anticipating our Lenten times of silence together, I've included a few teachings on silence from some seasoned practitioners.

“A psychoanalysis of chatter would suggest that our over-verbalization is an effort to avoid something which is fearful—silence. But why should the silence be threatening? Because words are a way of structuring, manipulating, and controlling; thus, when they are absent the specter of loss of control arises. If we cannot name it, we cannot control it. Naming gives us power. Hence, silence is impotence, the surrender of control. Control is power, and power is safety.” Belden Lane

“Silence reveals itself only to itself. Only when we enter as nothing and stay as nothing, will silence open its secret. Its secret is itself...Silence is the only teaching and the only teacher that is there all the time. Every minute that you are awake, every minute that you are alive, every minute that you breathe, it is right there.” Adyanshanti

“We must approach Silence in the right way and with the right attitude, which is not the attitude that says look at all the good, all the virtue, all the merit, all the deepening, all the creativity, peace, sensitivity, and ability to be more present in the world that we will get out of practicing Silence. We do not enter the realm of Silence for ourselves but to honor, give attention to, care for, give homage to and acknowledge the sacredness of the realm, and to gradually come to know its terrain with a decidedly different kind of knowing. Otherwise, our interest is nothing more than ego inflation. Silence must be recognized and honored as a holy and autonomous realm. We can easily become interested in Silence for what we think it can give us. But, in the face of its true reality, we are continually humbled and made aware that we are not adequate to be with Silence when relying on our own ordinary abilities.” Robert Sardello

“Sit quietly, and listen for a voice that will say, Be more silent.” Rumi

“I have come to understand solitude as an experience of relationship, specifically our relationship to reality. Lovers of solitude value this relationship and give it attention. We devote time for meditation, time to listen to silence, time to breathe in the vastness of space that surrounds us, time to make friends with ourselves.” Shaila Catherine

“The best spiritual language is silence.” Sam Keen

Our experience of God leads us to the point where it is no longer possible to speak about God. Silence is the only proper attitude.” Thomas Matus

Some Christian Education Opportunities Over the Horizon

We have some interesting, and hopefully, inspiring Christian Education opportunities coming up after the New Year.

In the season of Epiphany, **Rev. Dr. Van Herd** will lead a reading and reflection of the book, *Honest to Genesis, a Biblical and Scientific Challenge to Creationism*, by Dr. Margaret Gray Towne. Dr. Towne says of her book: “My book is written for everyone...theologians and pastors who are not as trained in science, and scientists who have not been trained in biblical hermeneutics. I have tried to make these subjects understandable to everyone.”

In the Season of Lent, Rev. Dr. Jo Jensen, Rev. Cecile Adam, and Rev. Tom VandeStadt will lead a series of reflections on where and how we experience (or don't experience) God in our everyday lives, based on the book, *My Bright Abyss*, by poet Christian Wiman. The series will not be a book discussion in which we critique the book. Rather, Jo, Cecile, and Tom will lift themes from the book for deeper reflection and discussion.

Church Announcements

Please help us serve **hot meals to the homeless** over the winter months. The **Homeless Ministry Team** is once again seeking contributions of **frozen meals** that can be reheated for serving at either **Front Porch Lunch or the Freeze Night Shelter**. Prepared meals should serve about 25 hungry people, and anything that freezes and reheats will work great – casseroles, pasta dishes, chili, etc. Please place your dishes in disposable roasting tins, cover with foil, freeze and tape a note to it indicating your name, the dish, and any reheating instructions. Then bring it to church either on Sunday or during office hours to be placed in one of the downstairs freezers. Contact **John Goff** (goff@ig.utexas.edu) with any questions. Thanks!

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
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmistress	Sara Ross
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Personals

by Pat Oakes

Pat Oakes had surgery on her lower back on Wednesday, January 27th, at Seton Hospital. She is looking forward to a full recovery. Her husband Mel has been such a pillar of strength and compassion getting her through this. She is grateful to folks in the congregation who have been so supportive sending prayers and good wishes her way.

Heather Lytle, an OB-GYN, and her husband Zac, who has worked in the low-income housing market here, moved to Malawi several months ago. They have worshipped with us many time over the years while Heather was in medical school in Dallas. Heather writes, "We are having some challenges with security and housing here in Malawi after a break-in over the holidays. Luckily we weren't home and nobody was hurt. We are hoping the situation can be sorted out in the next month but would appreciate prayers regarding that issue and also for continued guidance about the best way to proceed here. Things are obviously challenging on many levels. I'm still trying to figure out how to approach my work here which is challenging for so many reasons, not the least of which is the terrible state of the health care system here. Zac has been with the baby making sure she is doing well (which happily she is!) and is still looking to find some paid or volunteer position where he can use his skills. We were able to meet my parents and my brother in Cape Town for Christmas and New Years which was so great. They all loved getting to see Abi and we had a great time. I've attached a pic of Abi with penguins at Boulder Beach for your amusement."



The Freese/Summerlin family sends us their good wishes for a happy 2016. Talley reports that Vivian is currently playing on two basketball teams and Rose keeps busy as part of a writer's guild and with various forms of activism. Elizabeth completes her final comprehensive exam later this month and then gets into dissertation work. She is also adjunct teaching at Kean University as well playing a part-time role on the staff of the Feminist Studies in Religion Journal and book series. Talley continues to work in NYC, primarily doing PR for Philips LED lighting. They are going into their second year of community at the nearby Morristown Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and feel they really have a home there. They hope all is well with everyone!

Gail Christeson has several exciting months of field work ahead of her after staying in Austin for the past year. She will celebrate her 50th birthday by spending January and February in the South Atlantic of a project focused on the evolution of 70 million years of oceanic crust. Because of complicated logistics, the cruise will use the port of Cape Verde Islands, offshore of Africa. Then, in April it is off to Mexico to drill the Chicxulub impact crater (the dinosaur killer!!), followed by almost a month in Bremen, Germany, in the fall to examine the drilled rocks in a special laboratory. In the meantime, John, also at UT geophysicist, will be holding down the fort at home while Megan continues her sophomore year at Anderson High School and Cameron continues his freshman year at UT. Do check in on Gail's blog at <https://crestfest.wordpress.com/2016/01/07/deja-vu/>



12/15 Abi Lytle, who was christened at our church last August, visiting with penguins over the Christmas holidays in South Africa with her parents and grandparents

Nodie Murphy, our amazing music director reports, "I hadn't heard from Aaron Carter-Cohn, our former pianist, in a while, so I sent out Christmas greetings by e-mail, and I received a phone call from him, informing me that he was in Austin visiting his father! Aaron and his wife, Quintina, were on their way to San Antonio, where he was preparing his house to be sold. They stopped by Austin on their way back to Columbus and had breakfast at our home. We had a lovely visit. Dennis and I finally got to deliver their wedding present. I found out that Quintina's name refers to the fact that she is the fifth child in her family. She was most fascinated by my great-grandmother's table that we had just brought over from my New Orleans home. Aaron will be defending his dissertation on April 4th, so he is busy finishing it--the focus is on the relationship between music and tonal languages. He is always involved with many projects, conducting a small, independent choral ensemble, as well as playing the organ in various locations. His mother is currently living with them in Ohio. Right now, they are not sure what the future holds, but they seem very happy together."



12/15 Zooney, Caleb, and Jason Parkhill had a wonderful time in the snow in Park City, Utah

Their trip home was a little less enjoyable. Their flight out of SLC was cancelled twice due to weather. They ended up splitting up in an effort to get Jason home and back to work. However, Zooney and Kristen ended up getting home first, while Jason and Caleb ended up in Los Angeles for two nights. They made the most of it by visiting the Pacific Ocean and a few Hollywood landmarks. Overall, it was a great trip! The snowy weather was fun, but a great reminder of why they moved to sunny Austin.



1/16 Quintina and Aaron Carter-Cohn had a wonderful visit with Nodie and Dennis Murphy recently.

The Parkhill family along with Kristen's mother Debby Kohrt had a joyous, snowy adventure spending Christmas in beautiful Salt Lake City with Jason's parents, Becky and Trent, and his brother Scott. Caleb and Zooney were most excited about the snow – this was Zooney's first time seeing snow in person! Jason's parents generously planned multiple fun activities for them, including laser tag and a viewing of the new Star Wars movie. But their favorite activity was spending Christmas Eve Day snow tubing at Gorgoza Park in Park City.



12/15 Zooney and Caleb Parkhill, snuggle bunnies on vacation in Utah.

Please keep the following folks in your prayers. Nancy Brown is getting used to her new home. She enjoys visitors, cards and phone calls. Her address is Ms. Nancy Brown c/o Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Room 511, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Dr., Austin, TX 78753 and her phone is 512-233-7961. After several setbacks, Doyal Pinkard is slowly improving at the Health-south residential rehab facility on Red River. At this writing, he is expecting to be there another week before getting to come home. Both he and Tommie have greatly enjoyed visits from sons David (NYC) and Chris (CA). You can send cards to their home address at 813 Castle Ridge Road, Austin, TX 78746-5105. Barbara Johnson, mother of Warinda Harris and grandmother to Alden and William continues to recuperate from a stroke which has affected her speech. She is working on learning to use the computer and would enjoy notes or fun forwards which you can send to bdeblanc@aol.com.

Many folks in our congregation remember former member Paul Deisler who died this past summer. His daughter Julie sent us the following link about her dad and his wonderful skill as a thinker and a writer. Do take the time to read his inspiring poem on the Multiverse by clicking on this link: <https://miriamswell.wordpress.com/2016/01/20/julia-deisler-reflects-on-her-father-my-dad-science-and-the-multiverse/>



1/17/16 The congregation said farewell to cellist Colin Ferguson and his wife Eli at coffee hour.

Our wonderful cellist Colin Ferguson could not quite remember exactly when he came to be a part of our phenomenal trio, but he did remember that it was

before Mathis Blackstock became ill--which would make it about 2010 as Matt died in 2012. Colin and Eli, who married in early September, live in Bertram --a 45 mile commute each way. Colin and Eli both work in Austin (Colin plays in several groups plus having a day job at a music store) and spend many hours in the car. Colin finally decided that he and Eli needed some time at home and that Sundays were the best option. Over the years he has become part of our church family and he will be much missed. He promises they will be back to visit. Colin's replacement is Tony Rogers who has played a number of times for us while subbing for Colin.. Thanks to Nodie, our splendid music continues at the church!

Reuel Nash, head Santa, reports that the Christmas Open Door Meal was another success by every measure. About seventy folks came through the door for a hot meal and many more plates were taken out. Members of the church, visitors, and friends worked together to make everything work, sometimes having too much fun (three of the serving line folks started singing carols when the line got slow). Thank you to everyone involved, from buying the hams, decorating the tables, cooking the turkeys and other hot foods, carving the meats, making gravy, preparing salads and desserts, making tea and coffee, greeting our guests, serving, helping people to their seats, seeing what needed doing and doing it, running hot pans of food up and down the stairs, washing dishes constantly, recycling, taking out the trash, clearing the chairs and tables out of the way, and sweeping up! Reuel was reluctant to try to name names for fear he would leave someone out, but he does have some numbers to share: 12 in the kitchens, 8 on the main serving line, 6 on the dessert/drinks area, 6 runners, 4 helpers, 1 buyer, 1 recycling, 1 greeter, 6 cleanup. That's a total of about 40 people during the day. Many of those are former members (Marilyn Gaddis and her grandchildren), relatives (Chance, Cecile's grandson). Some are friends (our friends Cindy and Bill Locke, Cindy's mother Patsy, our friends Lazan and Bill Pargamon and their daughters). Hector Gonzales volunteered out of nowhere in 2014 and I asked him to return to take charge of all the carving. He came again in 2015 with his girlfriend Kylie and her service dog Lucky, and efficiently carved turkeys and ham until the work was done. Many thanks to all who helped bring a lot of Christmas joy to many folks in our little part of the world.

Heart of Texas Association News

February

by Liz Nash

On Sunday, April 3rd at our Spring Association meeting, we look forward to voting on and celebrating Hope United Church in Georgetown as a new member of the Heart of Texas Association. As many of you know, Hope United has been a new church start for the past 5 years --- we have embraced them as “one of us” (as well as being a dual affiliation church with the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ) from their beginning, but it is about to become official. Our Committee on Ministry met with a group from the church at its January 13th meeting, reviewed their constitution and bylaws, talked together about the growth and ongoing ministry of the church, and voted to recommend Hope for standing in the Association. We will be meeting at Hope United’s lovely worship space at the Heritage Oaks Clubhouse, 702 Heritage Oaks Bend in Georgetown. The start time will be decided after evaluating the drive time from our churches (announcement of time will go out soon), with the meeting to be followed by dinner.

Our Association churches have other joys that I want to share. Sonja and Dave Phillips were installed as co-pastors of Friedens UCC in Geronimo on Saturday, January 9th, followed by a delicious barbecue lunch. The church was full, Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown-Daniel preached, and several participated in the service and attended from across the Association. Another joy is that Faith UCC New Braunfels has launched a magnificent new outreach, LEAP, which stands for Literacy Education for Adults Program. After participating in the UCC literacy campaign last year, Faith members wanted to do more to help in this area. They looked into current programs and discovered New Braunfels had no active program to teach adults to read. So, Faith is taking on a big commitment to this ministry by finding a curriculum, having volunteers step up from the church, engaging in training, and offering their space and their dedication to this effort.

There was a very large response from this Association and from around the Conference (over 1800 signatures) to the petition to ask Governor Abbott to welcome Syrian refugees to Texas. This was a request offered knowing and respecting the differing responses, based on faith and thought, that people would have. Tom VandeStadt and Whit Bodman of Congregational Church of Austin are working to find an effective way to present this petition. The next step is to identify churches who are willing to sponsor a refugee family -- a major commitment. If your church is interested in sponsoring a family, please get in touch with me (lizknash@gmail.com). We will be exploring possibilities for doing this as we learn who is interested.

We continue to need more churches to send a representative to serve on our Association Executive Committee. Our new constitution and bylaws specify that each church is to be represented by a board member. Our next board meeting is scheduled for Saturday, March 12th, 10 am to noon, at St. Peter’s Church of Coupland. Send a delegate, have a voice, and join together in our work and ministry.

Finally, profound thanks go to Charles Stark, co-chair of our Committee on Ministry, who resigned from that position in early January. Charles and Anne Wehrly, our co-chairs, have done substantial and very appreciated work in bringing the former South Texas and Brazos Committees on Ministry together. Charles’ experience and knowledge of ministry throughout the Association have been invaluable.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Heart of Texas Association Minister

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Return Service Requested

March Visitor Deadline—February 17, 2015

History Corner

by Pat and Mel Oakes

Mel Oakes has been researching the names of the church over the years using old church files and newspaper articles. He has constructed the following graphic that illustrates the changes.

