

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



Several days after the Vatican released Pope Francis' Encyclical on climate change, Amy Stansbury, from the Aus-

tin Eco-Network, contacted me for an interview to see what impact the Encyclical was having on Austin's religious community. While I'm hardly a spokesperson for Austin's "religious community," I was more than willing to respond to her questions. What follows is a transcript of the interview, which appeared in the most recent Austin Eco-Network electronic newsletter.

AEN: What impact is the encyclical having on the local religious eco-community here in Austin?

TV: First off, there's deep gratitude that Pope Francis affirms the scientific consensus that humans are heating the planet by burning fossil fuels, reducing earth's biodiversity, and driving up the rate of species' extinction, all in very alarming ways. It's crucially important that religious leaders publically affirm the scientific consensus. But even more profoundly, the Pope very strenuously proclaims that the issue of climate change is inseparable from the issue of political and economic justice. The suffering of the earth and the suffering of the poor are bound together. And what's producing that suffering is a political economy dominated by hearts and minds obsessed with wealth, power, and consumption. Many religious people are deeply grateful to the Pope for making that connection so strongly.

With that said, there's a flurry of activity in Austin right now to encourage people to read the Encyclical. There will no doubt be, especially as we lead up to the climate talks in Paris, a lot of forums and dialogue groups meeting to discuss it. And right now, The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy is asking people to sign a letter of support for the Pope's Encyclical, and to take what they're calling the Paris Pledge—to cut their carbon pollution in half by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2050.

AEN: Have local organizations and congregations already taken the lead on the issues and beliefs expressed in the encyclical?

TV: Absolutely. Texas Impact, Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Faith Energy Action Team, Interfaith Environmental Network, Austin Interfaith, BioIntegrity—these are all local faith-based organizations for which the issue of climate change, and political and economic justice, intersect. These groups work on the local, state, and international level, from supporting the Austin Community Climate Action Plan, to working on state water issues, to protecting biodiversity in the tropics.

In Austin, there have been a number of interfaith events on climate change, from interfaith dialogues to the Interfaith Environmental Network's annual preach-off, which brings together Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian leaders to speak-out on climate change.

Finally, a number of Austin's churches, synagogues, and Zen centers have made huge strides in reducing their carbon footprint by making their buildings energy-efficient, installing solar panels, and buying carbon offsets.

AEN: How are religion, the environment and climate change connected? Do you see climate change as an issue that religious groups, on both a global and local level, should be involved in? Why?

TV: All the major religious traditions proclaim some version of the teaching that the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth, or to the One who created the earth, and that it is humanity's responsibility to care responsibly for the earth. It is our responsibility to bring about justice and peace, to live in harmony, to seek the common good for all that exists on earth. Now this teaching has all too often been forgotten or distorted into its opposite. We live in a world where humans oppress both one another and the earth. This oppression creates deep wounds, both within people and upon the earth. And it creates division and conflict, where people see themselves set apart from the earth and set against each other. For me, healthy religious practice seeks to liberate the oppressed, heal the wounds, and reconcile the conflicts, both within people and upon the earth. So for me, climate change is, at its very root, a religious issue.

AEN: Name one passage of the encyclical that really stood out to you. Explain why you picked it.

TV: An excerpt from paragraph 179 reads: "...while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity, and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will leave their children and grandchildren...Unless citizens control political power—national, regional and municipal, it will not be possible to control damage to the environment."

The Pope stresses here the necessity of local action. While climate change is an issue of global proportions, with big powerful interests at play, every citizen has a responsibility to be engaged locally in their community and within the local political process.

AEN: How can Austinites get more involved in fighting climate change and putting the pope's words into action?

TV: The Pope uses the word "sober" a lot in his Encyclical. Basically, what he's saying is, "Wake up and come to your senses!" Become acutely aware of the impact your lifestyle is having on the earth and other people, especially the poor. That's really the first step. Become acutely aware of the impact your carbon footprint and your consumption patterns are having on the earth and other people. And then change everything you possibly can to lessen your carbon footprint and to reduce your consumption. In other words, get a carbon audit on your house, buy less and buy more local.

Besides that, get personally involved with any of the groups I've mentioned, or any of the other groups Austin Eco-Network promotes. We need to build a strong movement that fully integrates climate justice, political justice, and economic justice. Find a group with whom you can work most effectively, be it a religious or a secular group. You'll make friends, and you'll help save the earth.

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



6/6/2015 Pam Tucker enjoying some sun in Florida

Pam Tucker is more than half way through her 8 chemo treatments for Stage 2 breast cancer, having started the 5th treatment with a new drug on June 25th. She is feeling the effects of the chemo, but she and **Alison** and **Savanna** and **Harrison** were able to go to **Treasure Island, FL** for a week at the beach at the beginning of June. They had this trip scheduled and fortunately it fell at a time when Pam could go and not interfere with her chemo treatments. The kids had not ever really been to the ocean; Sav saw the beach when she was about 2-1/2 years old and Harrison saw the ocean at Corpus, but that was it. The beach at Treasure Island was really nice: lots of beautiful sand, lots of shells and sand dollars, shallow water for a few hundred yards out, waves that are not strong, warm water that is pretty clear. It was a great time and they didn't get sunburned. They flew kites on the beach, tried to build sand castles, swam (trying to avoid the stingrays!) and looked for shells. They all spent time reading. They went to an arcade for Harrison to play

games and Sav got a henna tattoo. They watched Forrest Gump and went to eat at the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company. Fish and ice cream were on the menu almost every day (not at the same time!). There was an ice cream shop nearly every block. They had a really nice time. Pam notes, "I am very fortunate."



6/21/15 Pam Tucker keeping her head warm in the air-conditioning at church

Good news! The **Howicz** family is planning to move back to **Austin** from **West Chester, PA**, the last week of July - and **Jen** says it can't come soon enough!! **Jim** started his new job here in Austin on **June 1** at the law firm of **Richards, Rodriguez and Skeith**, and has been commuting all month. Jen is finishing her job in West Chester, and will spend the next few weeks packing. They're still not sure where they're going to live yet and are focusing on trying to find the best school options for **Tess**. Tess just got out of school for the summer. She and older sister **Emily** are enjoying some summer down time right now, and they are cramming in as much touristy time that they can before they leave. Jen says, "I can't tell you how excited we are to see everyone. We have missed you all so much!"

Church book club members gathered on **Saturday, June 13**, at **Rambie and Fran Briggs'** lake house to read poetry, enjoy a meal together, and marvel at **Lake Travis** full of water. Those who enjoyed the time together were **John** and **Carol Burlinson**, **Dave** and **Sara Ross**, **Mike** and **Joy Hall**, **Loren Stell** and **Kathleen Hall**, **Lynne** and **Katie Lemley**, **Sam**

Sutherland, Bill Briggs, Jim Vick, Barbara Burnham, and Geneva Ross. Katie revealed her heretofore unknown poetic talent to the approbation of all. Another surprise during lunch was hearing John Burlinson play the Briggs's piano beautifully.

While the choir is on summer hiatus, for the past several years choir director **Nodie Murphy** has implemented the summer worship gift program. On **June 14th**, mom **Shannon** and twin daughters **Juliet** (with drum) and **Scarlett Quisenberry** delighted the congregation by performing "A Hundred Million Miracles" from the musical "Flower Drum Song." Congratulations to **Barbara Burnham** who, on **June**



6/14/15 Shannon, Juliet, and Scarlett Quisenberry presented a wonderful worship gift

7th, was elected **Regional Coordinator** of the **South Central Texas Region** of the **Jane Austen Society of North America**. She had been acting as Interim Coordinator since the passing of our former coordinator, **Bill Lesso**, in March. She is also serving as a judge in the college division of the national Jane Austen essay contest. The judges just finished round one, in which Barbara judged 20 essays. Round two, with about that many, is just around the corner. She has really enjoyed reading the papers, and found that her judgments were roughly the same as the two other, more experienced judges in her group, which was validating. Her job as Regional Coordinator will be to plan and oversee all the programs of their very active region, working with two vice presidents to develop presentations in both San Antonio and Austin. It's challenging, but fun!



6/15 Delighted Victoria Li with her brand-new grandson Lucas Tau

Victoria Li's daughter **Jocelyn Tau** and son-in-law **Andy Tau** had their first baby, **Lucas Tau**, on **May 31, 2015**, in **Houston**. Baby Lucas weighed **8 lbs. 1 oz.** Victoria spent 6 days with the young family, came back to Austin for a couple of meetings at the City, and went back for another week.

Lisa Kirch reports that her daughter **Sarah** has completed her first year at **School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC)** and has a summer job which she loves. If you are in Chicago this summer, you can get a great slice of pizza at **Dimo's**--and Sarah might be your server.

Jo Jensen has completed her first book, but hopes to publish more in her retirement. She is still working full time as the oncology chaplain for the **Shivers Clinic** (She left Dell Children's 3 years ago). Shivers is the only outpatient clinic in central Texas treating adults diagnosed with cancer who have little, if any, insurance. When a patient loses his or her job due to the cancer treatment, they often also lose their insur-

Heart of Texas Association News

June

by Liz Nash

Several churches from the Heart of Texas Association gave wonderful and generous gifts of Church World Service school kits and Back Bay Mission hygiene kits at our Annual Meeting this past June. The kits all include donations of a specific list of items, many packed in bags sewn by church members, with all requiring time and effort to sort, pack, and deliver as well as money donations for shipping costs. Nine of our churches donated 373 school kits and 80 hygiene kits. Heartfelt thanks to Community UCC, San Antonio; St. Peter's, Coupland; Evangelical UCC, Lyons; Faith UCC, Bryan; Weimar UCC; United Christian, Austin; Friedens UCC, Washington; Friedens UCC, Geronimo; Friends Congregational, College Station; and St. John's UCC, Burton. A special joy is that Friedens Church of Washington used this opportunity as part of their celebration of 125 years of ministry by giving 125 school kits and 134 hygiene kits. (And please let me know if your church provided kits and is not on this list. I want to list you.) What a terrific way for all of these churches to celebrate God's gifts to all of us by sharing in this ministry of compassion and care.

Reverend Ginny Brown-Daniel, known to many of us as the pastor, until this past May, of Plymouth UCC in Spring, has continued her ministry by starting Divine Sparks Consulting, providing affordable leadership conferences and spiritual retreats to ministers of local churches (<http://divinesparksconsulting.com/>). She will be beginning this work by leading two workshops in July at Heart of Texas Association churches on "The Nuts and Bolts of Marriage Equality in the Local Church" -- at Faith UCC, New Braunfels on Monday, July 13th and at Church of the Savior, Austin on Monday, July 27th. These events will provide context, reflection, and practical steps for clergy seeking to respond to the possible advent of marriage equality in Texas (still pending as of the writing of this article).

More workshops on other topics will be coming. For more information about any of these opportunities for a more vibrant ministry, contact Ginny Brown-Daniel at ginny.divinesparks@gmail.com.

In our churches, we are welcoming, celebrating, and saying farewell. We welcome Pastor Risa Garza to her new ministry as the Associate Minister of St. John's UCC, Burton in June. We celebrate the ministry of Ralph Ludwig as chaplain of Edenhill Community and Sandy Ludwig in her chaplain ministry work there as they retire this month. We join in remembering and rejoicing in the life of Anna Belle Mohr whose memorial was held at St. Peter's UCC on June 27. Anna Belle, known to many, was the wife of Paul Mohr, Pastor Emeritus of St. Peter's. And our prayers go with Community UCC, San Antonio as the church has voted to end ministry early next year after celebrating their 90th anniversary.

Blessings in Christ

Liz Nash

Heart of Texas Association Minister

ance. Companies like **Texas Oncology** send their patients like that to Shivers. Of course, they see many from the beginning who only have Medicare. Jo plans to remain there remain until retirement. Her book was nearly 3 years in the writing process and about 6 months in the publishing process. The title is *The Be-Attitudes of Chaplaincy* and illustrates many of the spiritual tasks of chaplain ministry through narrative, poetry, visual imagery, and prayers Jo composed. Jo expects it to go live on Amazon around the first of July. The publisher is **Whatif Publishing** and **CreateSpace** (Amazon's independent publishing company). Her "beta" reader has been highly complimentary in her review, and feels that anyone involved in pastoral care (isn't that every disciple?) would benefit from reading it.



Ruth Koenig is continuing to recuperate from her shoulder replacement surgery.



5/19/15 **Beth Gleason** at the entrance to Mary's house in Ephesus

Beth Gleason greatly enjoyed an interfaith trip to **Turkey** (including 5 cities) sponsored by Austin's **Raindrop House** from **May 13 - May 26**. There were Christian and Jewish clergy on the trip and they met with NGO's, journalism and political institutes and became immersed in Turkey's political, economic and social issues. They also toured excavated destinations important to Muslim and Christian faiths, such as **Ephesus**, **Cappadocia** and **Rumi's birthplace** in **Antalya**. Beth will be part of a **2016 Interfaith Turkey trip** initiative and will be recruiting UCC clergy/lay participants from the **South Central Conference**. Beth says, "This was a fabulous trip and should not be missed - (in particular, the Gospel came alive for me in Ephesus....unbelievable!)."



6/28/15 **Pat Oakes** and **Vic Appel** were delighted to have recuperating **Ruth Koenig** at church for their birthday celebration at coffee hour

Suzanne Vanderpoel had a wonderful time in **College**

Station the **Saturday of Mother's Day weekend-- May 9**. Her grandson **Ty Hemphill** participated in the **Corps of Cadets' Final Review** following the tradition of marching in to the field in full uniform and at the end of the review marching out, changing clothes and coming back to the review stand to smoke cigars! After the ceremony, Ty, his mom **Gina**, Suzanne and others adjourned to a favorite haunt of the Corps, the nearby **Dixie Chicken** where they enjoyed classic burgers. After their lunch they went to see the apartment complex where Ty will be living until he graduates in December with a degree in engineering. Suzanne is also delighted that Ty's brother **Tanner**, who has been at **A&M** in **Galveston**, will be a sophomore in architecture at **A&M** in **College Station** and will also be a member of the **Corps' Flying Aces** - the same unit as Ty. The next day, back in Austin, Suzanne enjoyed spending Mother's Day with her brother and sister-in-law.

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Return Service Requested

September Visitor Deadline—August 27, 2015

History Corner
by Pat and Mel Oakes



Ca. 1900 - Lula & Newton Alexander in their Austin drugstore

Last month we learned about **Mrs. N.J. Alexander** and the **three medallions** that are dedicated to her Sunday school classes--one in the sanctuary (on the pulpit side at the very back) and two in the fellowship hall. Since then **Mel Oakes** (a.k.a. Sherlock Holmes--don't ask me how Mel figures these things out!!) contacted **Jim Lundbeck**, who now lives in **Temple, TX**, but who grew up in **California**. He is the grandnephew of **Lula Alexander**. Mel and I met Jim and his wife **Jan** on **June 12th** and showed them around the church. They had never seen the church or the windows dedicated by his great-aunt. They also had wonderful old family pictures to share which are now on the church history Web

page. Both Lula and her husband Newton J. Alexander are buried in **Oakwood Cemetery** near **MLK** and **IH-35** as are **Rev. Briggs**, first pastor of this church, and his wife.



6/12/15 Jan and Jim Lundbeck by the medallion dedicated by his great-aunt to class #5.
Jim is Lula Alexander's grandnephew