

# THE VISITOR

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

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



**I**n his book, *Out of the Earth, Civilization and the Life of the Soil*, soil physicist Daniel Hillel de-

scribes the complex nature of the earth's soil. What may seem to us a simple and mundane substance—dirt—is anything but. Indeed, Hillel likens all the organic and inorganic materials that combine through elaborate and intricate processes to become soil to the human body: “We can visualize the living soil as a composite body in the same way we think of the human body as a distinct organism, even though in reality it is an ensemble of numerous interdependent and symbiotically coordinated groups of compounds, cells, organs, and colonies of varied microorganisms.”

The Apostle Paul used the human body to describe the church. The human body, though consisting of many members, is one body. All the members are indispensable to the one body and contribute to the body's functioning. All the members depend upon one another, and upon the body as a whole.

I've always appreciated how the Apostle Paul used the human body as a metaphor for the church. It's so down-to-earth. Of course, we know today that the human body did evolve from the earth. The Hebrew rabbis who wrote the second creation myth found in Genesis were on to something, more than they themselves ever knew or appreciated, when

they described God creating the first human, Adam, from the dust, the soil, the earth. Adam's name is derived from the Hebrew word, *adama*, which means earth, soil, ground. The ancient rabbis didn't have the benefit of our scientific understanding of evolution, but they certainly understood humanity's intimate relationship to the earth's soil. Adam—created from the vast complex system of earth's natural relationships, embodying earth's very own matter and energy, water and minerals, gases and nutrients.

We are formed *from* the body of the earth, but we are also formed *as* the Body of Christ. Our lives as earth creatures, as humans, takes a certain form. Aware that we are related to one another, to all people, and to all that exists on earth, we seek to infuse all of our relationships with the qualities Jesus Christ embodied. The qualities with which Jesus Christ related to everyone and everything. Our way of being human in a Christ-like way is not limited to how we treat one another and other human beings. Our embodiment of Christ's way extends to the earth itself. The body from which we are formed and always a part.

Let us be deeply mindful and appreciative of the two bodies that have formed us, the two bodies of which we are a part—the body of the earth and the Body of Christ. Let us live as that part of the earth's body that has become human in a manner that seeks to embody Christ's healing and reconciling love. And let us be deeply mindful of how the Body of Christ depends upon the earth's body for its life and sustenance, and how the earth's body now depends upon the Body of Christ for the healing and reconciliation that must occur.

**Review of *The Misunderstood Jew: the Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* by Amy-Jill Levine (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006)**

Reviewed by Whit Bodman, Associate Professor of Comparative Religion at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
This was published in the Summer/Fall edition of Windows.

Jesus was a Jew, a Rabbi even. Everybody knows that but, even knowing that, we keep treating him as if he were a Christian, which he wasn't.

Amy-Jill Levine, an Orthodox Jew who teaches New Testament at Vanderbilt Divinity School (pause, think about that) has spent much of her life trying to teach Christians to understand Jesus as a Jew.

She also has a great sense of humor, which makes *The Misunderstood Jew* a delight to read. This is clear from the very first line of the Introduction, "When I was a child, my ambition was to be Pope." Clearly this is a Jew with some Christian sympathies.

The central issue that Levine engages is the paradox and tension between, on the one hand, a modern Christian rapprochement with Jews and Judaism, and, on the other hand, the anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament and the continuing mischaracterization of Judaism in modern Christian interpretation and preaching. Mainline denominations – the Presbyterian Church included – have rejected replacement theology – the idea that the Christian faith has rendered Judaism invalid and anachronistic. We have rejected classical anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews. We see Jews as fellow travelers in the way of a common God.

On the other hand, in preaching and teaching the New Testament we continue to represent Jews at the time of Jesus as cursed by a burdensome law, consumed with issues of purity, anti-woman, anti-Gentile, worshipping in a Temple that exacerbated social divisions, and, in a multitude of ways, clanish and xenophobic. And Jesus came to undo all of that.

It is not so simple. Levine argues that Jesus needs to be seen in continuity with the history of Jewish prophets and teachers. The New Testament is a text written during a period of religious competition and debate both within Judaism and between Jews and Gentiles. Such struggle to define the es-

sense and practice of the faith is nothing new, and in fact continues today within Christianity and even within denominations (need I cite examples?).

Ultimately, Levine writes to help Jews and Christians living in the modern world treat each other in ways that do not cause pain, but rather engender respect and even love. She writes, "'if we are to get past the forced politeness that often marks interreligious conversation and take back the risk of engaging and honest communication, we must make every effort to see through each other's eyes, hear with each other's ears, and interpret with the consciousness of each other's sensitivities. . . To engage in interfaith conversation means to understand that what is dogma to one participant is danger to another, that what is profound may also be painful.'" (p. 117).

Readers of *The Misunderstood Jew* will learn to preach more responsibly and hear more acutely. We will find a detailed examination of the Gospels, a closer understanding of Jesus, and a bridge to knowledgeable conversation with our contemporary Jewish companions on the road of Godly faith and practice.

### 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

Our former church violinist **Andy Streitmeier** and his wife **Dennita** were in town for our cellist **Colin Ferguson's** wedding to **Eli Mateos** the night before (September 5), and enjoyed a coffee hour visit with **Bill Beardall** and the rest of the folks after church. Daughter **Charlotte** enjoyed the service, too. Stay tuned for news next month about Colin and Eli's wedding and their honeymoon travels.



9/6/15 Dennita Linnertz and Andy Streitmeier were in church with daughter Charlotte (almost 1).

**Betty Bodman's** lovely mother **Florence Jordan**, 91, died peacefully in Austin on **Aug. 27th** with Betty at her side. While Florence had not been able to come to church in the last few years, many of us remember her beautiful smile and kind manner. She



3/31/13 Florence Jordan at church on Easter Sunday, 2013

was a wonderful help for several years helping with the preparation for our annual **Easter brunch**. In **March**, her granddaughter **Elizabeth** brought her daughter **Clara** from **New Jersey** to Austin so that she could meet her only great-grandchild. In **September**, Elizabeth returned with Clara to spend a few days here in Austin with Betty and **Whit** and then went on to **Houston** with them for the memorial service for Florence. Here is the link for Florence's obituary: [Obituary Listings for Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Home - Tributes.com](http://Obituary Listings for Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Home - Tributes.com)



9/6/15 Betty Bodman with her 18 month-old granddaughter Clara Jordan Matthews visiting from New Jersey

**George Hetrick** got bored with retirement and has just started a new job at **Silicon Labs** on Cesar Chavez right downtown. He's taking advantage of the 50% discount on MetroRail for seniors, and is planning to start biking to the train station, so that he can still get some exercise. He bought a folding bike that he can take on the train.

**Don Miles'** grandson, **Austin Ritzman**, was married in a formal military wedding in **Nashville** this summer. The clergyman had been the chaplain of Austin's unit when he was serving in Afghanistan in 2014 and earlier this year. Don was invited to the "sword-polishing" party the night before the wedding, and the bride and groom emerged from the chapel under an archway of crossed swords after the ceremony. Don treated himself to a gourmet tour while he was en route and returning from the wedding, sampling seafood dishes and martinis at grand hotels in **Little Rock, Chattanooga, and Vicksburg, MS**. He also re-visited Vicksburg and its **National Military Park** with a friend over Labor Day weekend, sleeping in **Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's bedroom** at the **Cedar Grove mansion** once owned by a niece of **General Sherman**.

The **Austin Piazzolla Quintet** with our own **Jonathan Geer** on keyboard, **James Anderson** on violin (who subs for Amy on occasion), **Tony Rogers** on cello (Tony has been subbing at church for **Colin Ferguson** who has been on his honeymoon with **Eli in Europe**), **Mike Maddux** on accordion, and **Pat Harris** on bass serenaded folks at **Villa Antonia** recently. Villa Antonia is a lovely venue overlooking Lake Travis. **Rambie** and **Fran Briggs** were privileged to hear the group and visit with them afterward.



9/15 The Austin Piazzolla Quintet

It has been a long time since we have seen **Joe McMillan**. He reports that he has passed the 2 year "clean" mark but has another MRI coming up soon. He says that he is still undergoing wound care (from radiation treatments from his cancer several years ago) and that he is physically fair-to-middling.

The tremendous rains that the Austin area had last May did no damage to his newly renovated home which had had problems with flooding for years. **Willie Hall** and his mom **Ella Mae**, 81, are still living with Joe. The three of them enjoyed a wonderful, friendly invasion this summer. Great-nephew nine-year-old **Jaden Joseph** (who is Joe's namesake and was christened in the church about 7 years ago) came for a 2-week visit from **Plainfield, NJ**, along with his twin little brother **Blake** and sister **Brooklyn** (4) and the youngest little boy Austin, 1 1/2. They were accompanied by Joe's two sisters **Kamala** and **Aliyah** and his niece **Kaia**, mother of the 4 children. They had a wonderful and lively time swimming every day, going to the circus, the Austin Aquarium, and to Sea World. Joe admits that he has gotten out of the habit of coming to church and promises to mend his ways soon! We miss you, Joe, and look forward to your coming back to be with us soon.



4/8/12 The prayer net on Easter Sunday before church

For new attendees at the church, some may wonder what the significance is of the **colorful net** that is hanging on the door on the pulpit side of the sanctuary. Each fabric tie represents a prayer offered by a member of the congregation. The net was the suggestion of **Jo Jensen**, who at the time it was started, was a chaplain at **Dell Children's Hospital**. We often include the prayer net as part of the service on communion Sunday, but there are ties nearby for congregants to use at any time. As you can tell from the photo, there have been many prayers offered since 2012.

## Heart of Texas Association News

September

by Liz Nash

Our Association Committee on Ministry met with representatives from Trinity Church of Austin on August 29th, and voted to recommend Trinity for dual affiliation with the Heart of Texas Association as a United Methodist/UCC union church. We also voted to grant the Rev. Sid Hall, Trinity's pastor, dual standing as a minister in our Association. With the Church and Ministry action, we finalized the Association fall meeting place at **Trinity Church of Austin, 4001 Speedway, in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Austin north of the University of Texas campus. Registration will be at 9:30, with the meeting beginning at 10 am and lasting through lunch.** Although the church has changed its name, it is still known as Trinity United Methodist Church, the name on its website, <http://www.tumc.org/>, and on its sign -- know you are in the right place when you see either name!

We have important business and a real celebration coming at our meeting. Business includes voting to welcome Trinity as a church with standing in the Heart of Texas Association as well as voting on our new Association constitution and bylaws. The draft constitution and bylaws will be sent to all of our churches, ministers, board members, and Committee on Ministry members, so ask any of these for a copy in the coming weeks. We want all interested people to read these beforehand and send any concerns or comments to me or to Association Moderator John Boydston ([lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com) or [jrbnews@gmail.com](mailto:jrbnews@gmail.com)). If we can have any needed changes made before our meeting, we will have more time to celebrate and welcome Trinity.

Our Committee on Ministry also voted to grant standing to Rev. Crystal Silva-McCormick, a United Church of Christ minister serving as Associate Minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the Wells Branch area of Austin. Crystal transfers from the Eastern Iowa Association of the United Church of Christ, has her Master of Divinity from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and is a Ph.D. candidate in Muslim-Christian Relations at the

Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. We welcome Crystal in ministry among us.

We continue to rejoice, too, at the celebrations in our churches in September and October. These include a grand celebration of our brother Dan DeLeon's ten years of ministry at Friends Congregational September 19th and 20th, Hope United's charter signing on October 4, Friedens Church of Washington's 125th anniversary celebration on October 11th, and St. Peter's Church of Coupland's celebration as they honor John Sumner as Pastor Emeritus.

Our Ecumenical and Interfaith longtime partners at Texas Impact are offering several opportunities within our Association to learn about issues that affect us. On October 27th at 6 pm, Friends Congregational in College Station will host "Neighbors of Oil and Gas" to help those living on the Eagle Ford Shale recognize and report environmental incidents related to oil and gas activity, including fracking. On October 17th at 2 pm, University Presbyterian Church (next to Congregational Church of Austin) will host "Weapons in Worship?" to educate church members about how the new open carry law impacts their congregation.

Finally, it is with sadness that I report the withdrawal of Trinity Church of Niederwald from our Association and from the United Church of Christ. We have offered them our thanksgiving for their many years of ministry among us, and we give thanks, too, for the ministers among us, most recently Pastor Janet Sherman, who have served them faithfully.

Blessings in Christ

Liz Nash

Heart of Texas Association Minister

**Kathy Whatley**, our recently retired **Office Manager**, just returned from a trip with several girl friends (husband **Danny** opted to hold down the fort here) to **Italy** that included three days on the **Italian Riviera (Cinque Terre)**, **Tuscany**, and **Rome**. Some of the highlights of her trip included hiking the "**Blue Trail**" from **Monterosso** to **Ver-nazza**, and five glorious days in **Montecontini Terme**. There were day trips to **Assisi**, **Pisa**, **Lucca**, **San Gimignano**, and **Florence** - with lots of gelato and pasta along the way. The trip concluded in Rome with a visit to **Vatican City** and **St. Peter's Basilica** where she viewed the **Sistine Chapel** and the interior of St. Peter's. All in all, it was a glorious time. Kathy feels very blessed to have seen so much art, sculpture and architecture that heretofore she only had viewed in books and online. The tour was with **Capital City Ski and Adventure Club**. Retirement is good, Kathy!



9/15 Kathy Whatley enjoyed hanging out with Puccini in Lucca, Italy.



9/15 Interior shot of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City

Our current **Office Manager**, **Rimma Aguirre**, also just returned from a trip to **Chicago** with her family and close friends, who'd never been to Chicago before. They stayed with Rimma's parents and explored so much that the city had to offer: they saw the almost complete skeleton of **Sue the T-Rex** at the **Field Museum**, took a walking historical tour along the **Chicago River**, went to the top of the **Willis (Sears) Tower** and bravely stood on the **SkyDeck**, strode through **Navy Pier** and **Millennium Park**, and gorged themselves on delicious food. Rimma celebrated her **30th birthday** on **September 26** with dinner on the **95th floor** of the **Hancock** building and then enjoyed laughs at the **Second City Theater**.



9/24/15 Rimma with family and friends outside of the Field Museum in Chicago.



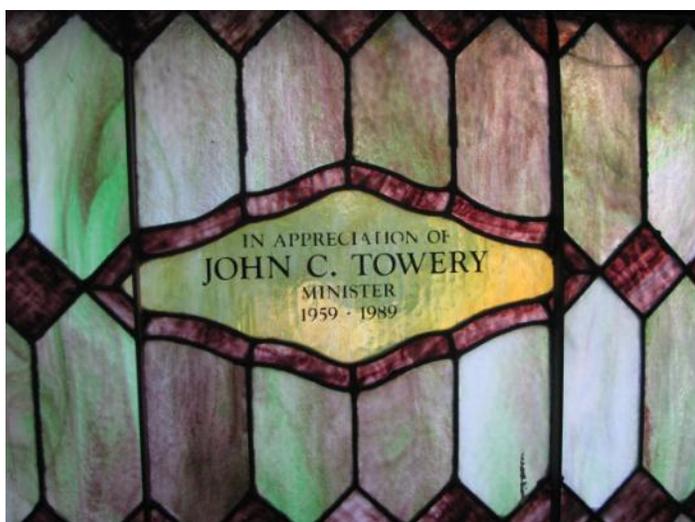
9/26/15 Rimma celebrated her 30th birthday at the top of the Hancock building. They were able to get a table next to the window with the best view of the city.

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**Return Service Requested**

## October Visitor Deadline—October 22, 2015

History Corner  
by Pat and Mel Oakes



9/21/14 Medallion on the pulpit side--In Appreciation of John C. Towery, Minister, 1959-1989

The Towery medallion is about 1/2 way along the pulpit side wall of windows. It celebrates John's 40 years as pastor of this church--1959-1989. Long-time members of the church can tell you wonderful stories about John and his wife Eleanor. You can find out much more about them by going to the church Web page at <http://congregationalchurchofaustin.org> and then going to Church History at the lower left.

Or, you can go directly to

[http://www.congregationalchurchofaustin.org/c\\_c\\_a\\_h\\_i\\_s\\_t\\_o\\_r\\_y/Congregational\\_Church\\_of\\_Austin\\_History/John\\_Chesley\\_Towery\\_Bio.html](http://www.congregationalchurchofaustin.org/c_c_a_h_i_s_t_o_r_y/Congregational_Church_of_Austin_History/John_Chesley_Towery_Bio.html)



8/12/1979 John and Eleanor Towery at the celebration of 20 years of John Towery's ministry

We had a wonderful picnic at Matt and Mary Blackstock's place on Lake Travis. John went on to serve the church for 20 more years!