

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



On the last Sunday of the season of Pentecost, the Sunday in which we celebrated Thanksgiving,

I reflected on the spirituality of appreciation. As it turns out, appreciation offers a wonderful segue into the season of Advent, in which we celebrate the light of hope, peace, love, and joy.

Appreciation includes gratitude. I'm grateful for all that I daily receive, for all that nourishes and sustains my life. I'm grateful for all the people on earth who nourish and sustain me in any number of ways, be it through their labor, a service they provide, or their friendship. People I know, many I'll never meet. I'm grateful for the earth. With gratitude, I give thanks.

Appreciation includes joy. I enjoy what I receive from other people and the earth. I enjoy the food I eat, the fresh air I breathe, the clean water I drink, the clothes I wear. I enjoy the company, the friendship, and the intimate fellowship of other people. I enjoy the extraordinary fact of being alive, and the particular life as *me* that I get to experience by virtue of the fact that countless other people and the earth give things that I receive, that countless other people and the earth nourish and sustain my life.

Appreciation includes love. I love what I receive from other people and the earth. I cherish what I receive. What I receive moves my heart to care for what I receive, to value what I receive. But not

only that. I also love those who give to me. I love the people from whom I receive. I love the earth from which I receive. When I receive what other people and the earth give, my heart is moved to care for those people and the earth. I love both the gift and the giver of the gift.

Appreciation includes understanding. I seek to understand those from whom I receive. Through paying close attention, being mindful, I seek to understand and be sensitive to what other people and the earth need, and sensitive to what I can give to other people and the earth. I try to restrain myself from taking what's not being offered, or taking in a way that does harm to other people and the earth. I seek to create and maintain a just and healthy relationship of receiving and giving with other people and the earth. I try to put myself in other people's shoes in order to appreciate their situation.

Appreciation includes growing. Through my gratitude, my joy, my love, and my seeking to understand other people and the earth, my relationship with other people and the earth grows stronger. It deepens. Becomes more respectful. More intimate. My relationships appreciate in value over time. Not in monetary value, but in the currency of friendship and respect.

Notice that two of the characteristics of a spirituality of appreciation—joy and love—are two of our Advent themes. And if we truly commit ourselves to the practice of appreciation, we like-wise commit ourselves to peace-making, because we commit ourselves to creating just and healthy relationships with other people and the earth. Finally, by practicing appreciation, we keep hope alive that our world may be a more just and peaceful place, where all relationships are healed and reconciled,

where all people are sensitive to one another's needs and treat one another with respect.

Appreciation—a great Advent spiritual practice.

Annual Candlelight Service and Christmas Party

On **December 20**, we will celebrate **Advent** with our Candlelight service of readings and carols. We'll gather at church at **7:00 pm** for the service, and then afterwards, head over to the home of **Pat and Mel Oakes** for the **Annual Christmas Party** that they so graciously host every year.

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

Sign-ups for **Christmas Dinner** will begin this **Sunday, December 6**. Like in the past, we'll need workers in the kitchen, on the serving line, and for cleanup at various times during the day, and we'll need folks to prepare food. Again this year, all hot food should be prepared in the hotel pans that will be distributed starting **Sunday, 12/13**. Contact reuelnash@gmail.com for more information.

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

We are going to start this month's Personals with a geography lesson. How many of you can find the African country (hint) of **Malawi** on a map? Check out <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malawi> and see if you were right. Why is that part of the Personals is another question you might ask. The answer is that those of us currently at the church know 3 people there--**Heather** and **Zac Lytle** and their infant daughter **Abi** who was christened at the church in **August**. While not members at the church, they have worshiped with us often over the years while Heather was in medical school in **Dallas**.



11/15 Abigail Lytle with her current caregiver



11/15 The Lytle family at a garden center near their house

L to R: Zac, Abigail, and Heather

They arrived in the capital of **Lilongwe** and are settling in there. Abi is, of course, still charming everyone. Heather has been doing some clinical work at the central hospital and also trying to determine some of the research and program development that she can work on while she's there. She is hoping to get involved with a maternity waiting home (a facility where women can stay next door to the health facility when they are approaching the end of their pregnancies to ensure that they don't have delays in transportation when they go into labor). She is also hoping to continue to work with the Malawian residents and clinical officers to teach C-section skills. Zac has been looking for work and also they are continuing to look for someone who will be able to help

them look after Abi during the day (the current lady they are working with already has a part-time job, so she isn't available full time). Heather says Malawi's economy is sinking into more dire times and it's certainly affecting health care in major ways. For example, at the central hospital where she is working (which is supposed to be the referral hospital for the entire country), they no longer have a functioning X-ray machine and they have in the past week called a halt to all laboratory testing. It's hard to imagine how they will expect anyone to try to care for patients without lab tests and hopefully this won't be a long term outage, although there seems to be no way to know. Heather's dad, an eye specialist, will be visiting for 2 weeks (including Thanksgiving) because he is hoping to come back in the spring to do eye surgery at a nonprofit health center just outside of Lilongwe. Heather's mother is coming in December and they are really looking forward to her having time to spend with Abi. Heather continues, "As for information about Malawi in general, the staple food is called nsima which is made from ground dried corn and has a consistency similar to mashed potatoes. It's served at pretty much every meal and comes with a 'relish' like a vegetable, beans, meat (the part that we would consider the

main dish here is considered the relish). We are about to come up on the rainy season which is the worst time for malaria and also a hard time for Malawians because usually the food gets much more expensive and scarce (they are having to use the last of the stored food before the harvest is ready at the end of the rainy season). I have heard that crime increases during this period so I am hoping we can stay safe both from malaria and crime. On the upside, it is supposed to become much more beautiful because all of the plants spring back to life and start growing and blooming. We are in the Southern Hemisphere here, so it's getting to be the warmest time of the year." We will be learning more about Malawi as the year goes on. Please keep the Lytle family in your prayers.



11/15 A gorgeous flame tree near the Lytles' home

Deacon **Jaime Hadley** had a wonderful idea about the **All Saints Day Sunday** service which **Tom** implemented. Jaime's idea was to have everyone in the congregation read the dedication from the New Century hymnal they were using in their pew during a special time in the service. For newcomers to the church, it was a chance to hear new names associated with the church that they had never heard. For old-timers, it was a wonderful time of good memories of the cloud of witnesses who watch over our church family.



11/15 Ruth Koenig with her two sons, John and Doug on her 88th birthday

Ruth Koenig had a wonderful surprise for her **88th birthday** which she celebrated on **November 15th**. Her son **John** lives here in Austin and her son **Doug** flew his plane, a **Beech Baron**, (owned with three business partners) in from **Lebanon, Ohio**, to near **Pflugerville** (the Executive Field) on the Saturday before the big day. It was a surprise hatched with John, but because of bad weather here, Doug was not sure he would be able to make it. The **Koenig-Greig** family, including Ruth's twin great-granddaughters, turned out en masse to welcome him. Ruth, John, and Doug had a great visit with a lot of one on one time for Ruth and her two "boys." He flew home on Thursday--it took him 6 hours, but that was less time--and less hassle than it would have been if he had flown commercially. Happy birthday, Ruth!

Mary Blackstock, widow of our beloved **Matt Blackstock**, celebrated her **89th birthday** with family on **October 5**, and then was serenaded royally by the members of her senior exercise class at the YMCA the next day at the conclusion of class. She and Matt attended the class for many years and Mary has continued. Recently Mary has been in **Louisiana** visiting family there.

Ned (alias "Ben") **Murphy**, son of **Nodie** and **Dennis**, was deployed on **November 8th** to **Afghanistan**. **Faye** and Ned's new baby boy **James Arthur** is just 6 weeks old, so they are hoping that there will be an opportunity for Skype calls. He'll be there for eight months, or until the Army tells him differently. His address is:

SGT Benjamin E. Murphy
 B Troop, 1/89 Cav
 TB Dwyer
 APO AE 09354

I'm sure he'd appreciate hearing from any of the folks at the Congregational Church of Austin.



11/15/15 It was a joy to see **Mary Sinclair** and **Richard Jackson** in church on the 15th
 L to R: **Doyal Pinkard**, **Cathy Hubbs**, **Mary and Richard**, **Sara Ross**, **Norma Hawes**



8/15 **Ed and Priscilla Perkins Grew** in **Edinburgh** for the awards ceremony

Priscilla Grew, daughter of the late **Rev. Dr. and Mrs. James C. Perkins** who were members 1962-1993, sends her best regards to us with the news that she retired **Oct 1, 2015**, as **Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum** and **Professor in the Dept. of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences**. Priscilla is remaining in **Lincoln** as **Director and Professor Emerita** and is continuing her unsalaried position as **UNL NAGPRA Coordinator for repatriation of Native American remains to Tribes**. Her husband **Ed** continues at the **University of Maine**. He was awarded the **Collins Medal** by the **Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland** at a ceremony in **Edinburgh** in **July**. The journal *Canadian Mineralogist* commemorated his **70th birthday** with a special issue of 12 papers by 63 of his international colleagues featuring the structure of the new mineral edgrewite on the cover. Since Oct. 1, Priscilla has travelled to **D.C., Michigan, Dallas** and, most recently, **Maine**, to celebrate her **75th birthday** with Ed. At the end of October she and Ed were on the way to **Baltimore** for the national geology convention.

Old-timers at the church were delighted to see **Mary Sinclair** and **Richard Jackson** at church on the **15th** of **November**. They were in town from **Heidelberg, Ontario, Canada** (not too far from Toronto). They moved from Austin 11 years ago, first to **Colorado** and then on to Canada where they were from originally. The reason for the visit was a reunion of Dick's co-workers from his Austin years with **Intera**, now called **Geofirma**. They enjoyed a lively evening at the **Roosevelt Room** on E. 5th St with about 50 folks one evening. They were so pleased to see folks at the church. Mary shared pictures of **Mary Bukasi**, who is now 15 and a freshman in high school. About 16 years ago our church sponsored a refugee family from the **Congo**. Active in getting the Bukasi family settled were **Mary, Cathy Hubbs, and Lynne Lemley** and others. **Martin and Judith Bukasi** had 4 children when they arrived--**Eric, Gedeon, Kyria, and Israel**. They did not know when they arrived that another child was on the way. That child was a little girl whom Judith and Martin named **Mary** after **Mary Sinclair** in appreciation for all of her help. Tragically, **Judith** died of cancer 10 years ago. There is a picture of the family hanging in the fellowship hall. **Mary and Richard** are still in touch with the family and recently enjoyed a visit from **Martin** and his second wife **Joelle**, and **Mary**. Young **Mary** was delighted to have her first up-close encounter with a horse when **Mary** took her horseback riding.

Heart of Texas Association News

December

by Liz Nash

The Heart of Texas Association met at Trinity Church of Austin on Saturday, November 14th. With joy we voted unanimously to welcome Trinity into our Association and to grant them standing. Trinity, now a union church with dual standing in the United Methodist Church and the UCC, has gone through a substantial process of discernment among their members, of learning about the UCC, of work with the Conference and our Association Committee on Ministry, and of work with the corresponding ministries of the United Methodist Church. During this process, they wrote and approved a Constitution and Bylaws that reflects careful attention to the governance and ways of being church in both the United Methodist and UCC traditions. Also, as of our vote, Rev. Dr. Sid Hall, their senior pastor, now has dual standing as a minister in both the United Methodist Church and the UCC. Our thanks go to Trinity for welcoming us and for sharing some of their gifts with us, and to all those who were able to make time to come after the two week postponement of our meeting due to the floods on October 30th. We look forward to the ministry to come that we will share with this church.

We also made some major decisions in the life of our still newly merged Association at our fall meeting. We adopted Association Constitution and Bylaws, the fruit of hard work by moderator John Boydston and the editing of our executive board members. In this document, we combined features of the South Texas and Brazos Constitution and Bylaws, and feel we have a solid basis to chart our course in ministry. I know many of you received copies, but I encourage anyone who would like to have a copy to contact John or me. We also adopted the budget presented by our incoming treasurer, Joe Ward (Joe and Larry Winkelmann are currently our co-treasurers) and voted to standardize our dues at \$5 per church member, starting in 2016.

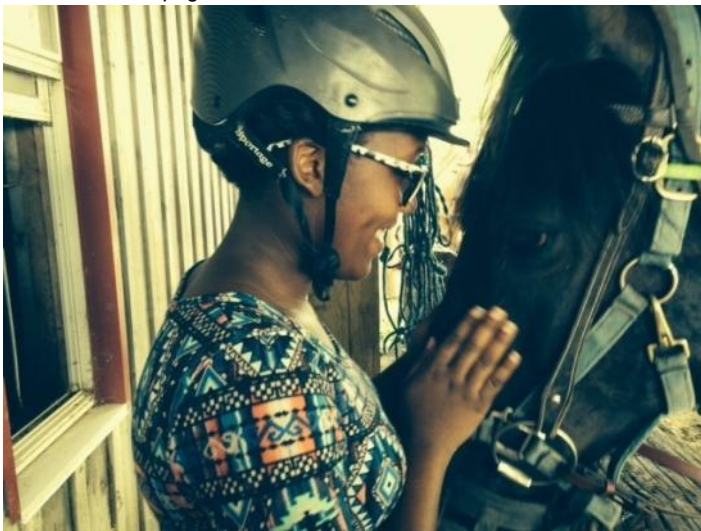
Coming up, all members of our Association churches are invited to the service of installation for Revs. Sonja and Dave Phillips as co-pastors of Friedens UCC in Geronimo on Saturday, January 9th, at 11 am at Friedens. The service of installation in the UCC is a celebration of ministry and solemn commitment for all of us to be in ministry together. I hope many of you can join this celebration and get to know Dave and Sonja.

Coming up, too, is the opportunity for youth in all of our churches to go to the National Youth Event (NYE) being held this summer at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort near Disneyworld this coming July 26th-30th. NYE is an unparalleled opportunity for connection with UCC youth from all over the US. It offers youth inspired programming to share the faith, and ways of leadership, service, and inspiration for social justice that are so much a part of our church. We will be joining with youth from the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ for the first time, a partnership that is so vital in many of our churches. To find out more, go to <http://nye.uccpages.org/>. Our Association is going to be offering substantial scholarships (as we have in the past) to all our youth who go to help cover travel expenses. Several of us in the South Central Conference are working on travel arrangements, and we will be letting all of our churches know how we plan to go.

Finally, congratulations to St. Peter's Church of Coupland and to John Sumner. On October 25th, St. Peter's named John Pastor Emeritus in a joyous celebration. It was a special joy to be able to there with them. John joins Jewell Johnson and Paul Mohr in this role as St. Peter's continues to honor those who have served them so faithfully and well.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash

Heart of Texas Association Minister



11/15 14-year-old Mary Karasi meets a horse for the first time in her life

Ninety-five-year-old **Nancy Brown** spent several days in **St. David's Hospital** being treated for dehydration recently and is continuing her recuperation at a skilled nursing center. She will be there for the next two weeks or so. It would give her great pleasure if you sent her a note, called, or stopped by. Her address is Ms. Nancy Brown % Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Room 511, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Dr., Austin, TX 78753--just east of IH35 and just off of Braker Lane. Her phone number is 512-233-7961.

Cathy Hubbs became a first-time great-grandmother on **August 21st** with the birth of her great-grandson, **Nicolas (Nico) Hubbs**. Nico lives with his parents (both attorneys) **Eric** and **Erica** in **Miami**. Eric is the son of Cathy's son **John Hubbs** and his wife **Doris**. In other Hubbs family news, granddaughter **Aiden**, daughter of **Laura Hubbs-Tait** and her late husband **David**, is now a full-fledged doctor. She and her husband **Felipe Vasconcellos** (they met in **Brazil** where Felipe is from) have settled in the **Bay Area** as Aiden is working at the **Stanford Medical School**.

It was good to see **Sam Bean** back in our midst several weeks ago. He is busy with music, both teaching and some performing, and running his pedicab in downtown Austin. He and his musical collaborator **Allan Raible** have two on-line albums now. Check out these Web sites to see what they are doing. <https://theslumsofmediocrity.bandcamp.com/album/the-kensington-sessions>, their first effort

and <https://theslumsofmediocrity.bandcamp.com/album/neon-catapult>.

Tommie and **Doyal Pinkard** have been alternating health problems recently. In early October Doyal was treated for a heart attack and has been getting stronger. In the meantime, Tommie has been struggling with breathing issues and recently spent a week in **Seton Hospital** with a bad cold. She got to go home on **Monday, November 16th**--their dog **Corky** was really glad to see her. Between the hospitalizations of Doyal and Tommie, son **David** finally made it to the Pinkards on **Sunday, All Saints Day, November 1**, to celebrate **Tommie's 87th birthday**. His reservation from New York was for the previous Friday, the day Austin's air control tower drowned (For those of you not here in Austin, we had terrible flooding that day and the airport got nearly 15 inches of rain). But he did arrive in time for a good visit and a barbecue dinner.

Upcoming Chorus Austin Events

Saturday, December 5

26th Annual "Sing-It-Yourself" Messiah
2:00pm at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

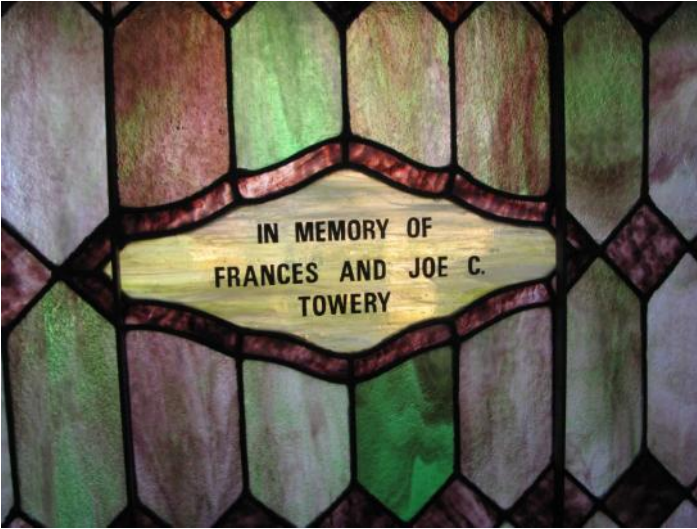
The yearly presentation in which you get to join the choir! Orchestra and soloists make the afternoon one that will raise your spirits as we enter into the holiday season.

Saturday, December 19

On A Winter's Eve annual holiday concert
4:00pm at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Our annual holiday concert features traditional and new carols, audience sing-along, and the world premiere of a work by Karen Thomas, commissioned by Chorus Austin. All three Chorus Austin ensembles will appear in a family-friendly concert not to be missed!

History Corner
by Pat and Mel Oakes



The memorial medallion for John Towery's parents, Frances and Joe C. Towery

Elsa Frances (Kirk) and Joe C. (Chesley) Towery were the parents of our pastor of 40 years, **John Chesley Towery**. John was the first of two sons. His younger brother is **William (Bill)**, who became a minister and teacher and now lives in nearby **Georgetown**. Their father was a teacher in **Kentucky** in John and Bill's early years. Frances taught high school English until the birth of her sons. Their grandchildren, **Ches, Sally, and Mary**, remember their grandparents with great love and affection. **Mary Towery Masters** recalls the wonderful summer vacations they took--driving with the five of them in the car (their dog **Foxie** even made the trip a couple of time). It would take them two very long days to get from **Austin** to **Ft. Lauderdale, FL**, where Duchess and Joe had retired. They would arrive in the middle of the night and Duchess, wearing a beautiful nightgown and peignoir, and Joe, in his robe, would be up waiting for them on the front porch. Sally Towery Johnson remembers their arrivals, too--feeling like they were the most special people ever to arrive at anyone's home. Both Sally and Mary remember that Joe loved to garden and raised beautiful flowers. Every morning he would deliver a fresh flower and an ice cold Coca-Cola to Duchess in bed. Joe loved to fish and would take grandson Ches fishing with him. The backyard of the house was on a canal with easy access to the ocean. Sometimes they would water ski along the canal. Joe continued to substitute teach while he was in Ft. Lauderdale and was walking into a school where he was to teach that day when he had a stroke and died later that same day. Those of us who have been in the church for a while remember when Frances, called Duchess, moved to Austin in 1980 or so to be near her son and family about 10 years after the death of her husband. After a year enjoying her independence in an apartment up the street from the parsonage at **1421 Ridgehaven Dr.**, just

off of Cameron Road, she moved in with Eleanor and John where she lived until her death in 1984. Special thanks to Ches Towery for sharing the pictures of Duchess and Joe, and to Ches, Sally, and Mary for their stories.

—Pat Oakes



Frances (Duchess) Towery--1901--1984



Joe C. Towery (1898--1970)

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Return Service Requested

January Visitor Deadline—December 23, 2015