

THE VISITOR

March 2018

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



The lonesome valley. Valleys can be dangerous. You're on low ground. Your paths are limited. There may only be one way out. Your enemies can easily surround you, ambush you. In a *lonesome* valley, you're in that dangerous place all by yourself. There's no one to help you.

One of the most comforting verses in the Bible is verse 4 of the 23rd Psalm: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me."

Our theme for this year's Good Friday Service will be "The Lonesome Valley." But we'll be reflecting on those people in the world today who, unlike the Psalmist, feel utterly alone in that valley. People filled with fear. People who've escaped one hell and crossed through hell just to enter another hell. People suffering alone without help, forsaken till death. People uttering a different Psalm.

I am on my own, I am
desperate with want.
They chase me through
killing fields;
force me over violent seas;
my soul is broken.
For their sake,
the unrighteous force me down paths
of suffering.

As I flee through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear evil,
for they pursue me;
their rods and their staffs—
they beat me.

The food is stolen from my table
by my enemies;
my head is covered with sores;
my cup is empty.
Surely pain and misery
shall inflict me
for the rest of my life,
and I shall be forsaken
on this earth
until the day I die.

(cont. from p. 1)

Who would utter such a Psalm? Civilians trapped in a war zone. Men, women and children fleeing ethnic cleansing or genocide and ending up in a squalid camp. Prisoners unjustly incarcerated for most of their lives. Someone about to be crucified, or executed by the side of the road. Anyone fearful for one's life and feeling alone. These people exist in our world, and we will remember them on Good Friday.

Tom

April Visitor Deadline—March 23, 2018

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Don Brown
Deacons Chair	Betty Bodman
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Bryan Rutherford
Christian Education	Lynne Lemley
Youth Sunday School Coordinator	John Burlinson
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmistresses:	Shannon Quisenberry, Sara Ross
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News

March

by Liz Nash

Our Heart of Texas Association spring meeting will be held on Saturday, April 21st, beginning at 11 am, with registration starting at 10:30, at Weimar UCC. This spring, we are meeting in the Brazos Valley group area, and we have changed our start time to 11am for the first time to allow more travel time in the morning for those who need to drive for several hours. The meeting will continue through lunch. We will be deciding the agenda and timeline soon, but we anticipate a gathering of similar length to those in the past. Weimar has graciously agreed to host, although the location is tentative pending completion of their new kitchen remodel. If the kitchen is done, we will be celebrating its completion with them. If Weimar is unable to host, Friends Congregational in College Station has also graciously agreed to be the backup location. Look for more details about the meeting soon.

As many of you know, the Heart of Texas Association is the host for this year's South Central Conference Annual Meeting, to be held Friday, June 1st - Saturday, June 2nd at Camp Allen, located between Navasota and Hempstead. The theme this year is "Gospel Bound." We will be having an installation service and celebration for Conference Minister **Don Longbottom** on Friday night, with UCC General Minister **John Dorhauer** preaching. Our program will be focused on workshops and discussion groups on the Conference's four priorities: spiritual formation, development, and renewal; living out the Jesus ethic; church revitalization and renewal; and fundraising to achieve these goals. Our planning

committee is doing creative work to put a great gathering together. For those who have been to Camp Allen, you will remember it as a beautiful conference center and camp. For those who have not been there, we invite you to come for the first time and enjoy the fellowship and worship at this lovely place. Registration material will be coming soon.

I have been asked recently about whether there will be a Southern Regional Youth Event this year. Apparently, there isn't one being planned, but there are four regional UCC youth events this summer, and we are invited to attend any of them. The closest is the West Central Youth Event in Grinnell, Iowa at the UCC-related Grinnell College on June 19th-23rd. The event promises "dynamic worship, hands on mission experience, small group faith exploration, inspirational music by the Convergence Music Project, and an opportunity for all to explore how to put their faith into action." I have been to several of these UCC youth events, and they are always marvelous and memorable opportunities for our youth and the adults who go with them. If you want to find out more about this event and the others across the country, go to <http://www.event.com/events/regional-youth-event-2018/event-summary-773217442e61480680434b11c349a1cb.aspx>.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals

by Pat Oakes

Our church family was delighted to have three new members join on Sunday, Feb. 18. **Carolyn Thompson** has recently moved back here after 25 years in the northeast. She grew up in south Texas, raised two daughters here in Austin, but left in 1992 for a sojourn with the ecumenical Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. From there she moved to Cambridge, MA, for seminary. Disability rights and ecumenism are the two themes that have defined much of her work life. Serving for 15 years with the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches proved to be one of her most stimulating and fulfilling experiences. She has also served on the Disability Ministries Board and the Wider Church Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ. **René Slataper** has been visiting with us for several months and has become active in the studies of the adult Sunday school class on mass incarceration. He has also started a meditation group at our church. **René** was recently accepted at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky. Fortunately for us, he will be able to do most of his class work online here in Austin. **René** was born in Houston but grew up in San Antonio. He graduated from Southwest Texas State University with a major in communication. Currently he is involved in outreach work to support transgender individuals.

attending a UCC church. She went to college majoring in biology and loves the sciences. Her current career plan is to become a physical therapist. Working toward that goal, she is currently working at a PT clinic in Austin as well as taking a physics course at ACC. She has other interests that fill her time (when she has more of it) including singing with an *acapella* group. She looks forward to the opportunity to be involved in our church's community outreach projects.

Fran and Rambie Briggs write, “We think we first came to the church in 1978 so we have enjoyed forty years with you--years which hold many precious memories. Since our move to Lago Vista, it has become increasingly difficult to make the 2-hour round trip into Austin. Beginning in January, we have been going to Rolling Hills Community Church (a congregation composed of Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples, and UCC,ers). Although since the deaths of **Rich and Gay Witmer**, we may be the only UCC attendees. We are finding a spiritual community that we can relate to. We still plan to visit from time-to-time so we can catch up with old friends. We will miss you and Tom's inspiring sermons. Keep us in your prayers.” You are already much missed! Don't be strangers—and we will certainly keep you in our prayers.



2/18/18 | - r New members Carolyn Thompson, René Slataper, and Linnaea Arnett

Linnaea Arnett moved to Austin in September of 2017 from Seattle, Washington, where she grew up



Rambie and Fran Briggs

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Keith Beresheim started a new job as a Financial Accountant at South West Key Programs on January 17 (his start date was pushed back a day because of the icy road conditions in Austin). He performs finance, accounting, decision support, budget, and special project analytics for their Unaccompanied Minor/Immigrant Shelter program. Here is a link explaining the department: <http://www.swkey.org/programs/shelters/>. Throughout his career, he has held roles in public accounting, internal audit, corporate accounting, and corporate finance. Most of his career has been spent at Baxter Healthcare based out of the Chicago suburbs. They are a leading medical device and supply company (IV bags, IV pumps, dialysis machines, plasma therapies, etc). **Keith** is excited about this new opportunity and thanks the Congregational Church of Austin family for their support before/during/after his job search process.



Keith Beresheim is enjoying his new job as a Financial Accountant at South West Key Programs.

On the evening of Thursday, Feb. 15, a group of about 30 folks gathered at the church to share a meal and to get to know each other a bit better. About half of the folks were from our church with the Deacons hosting and the other half were from Raindrop House in N. Austin (<http://raindropturkishhouse.org/texas/austin>). After a time of fellowship and sharing a meal of wonderful Turkish food, everyone gathered in the sanctuary for a discussion of the profound and difficult question, “Why Does God Allow Violence

In This World?” Leading the discussion were **Tom VandeStadt** and **Yetkin Yildrim, Ph.D.** **Dr. Yildrim** is the president and founding member of the Dialog Institute of the Southwest. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include interfaith dialog, conflict resolution, Islam, and Sufism, he is a writer and an organizer of many conferences. Everyone realized that we would not be able to answer the question entirely but it was enlightening to hear the differing views expressed.



2/15/18 Folks listening intently to Pastor Tom VandeStadt and Dr. Yetkin Yildrim during a discussion about why God allows violence in the world



2/15/18 Dr. Yetkin Yildrim speaking at an interfaith gathering at our church

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Anticipating the new photo/church directory which will be launched soon, **Ruth Koenig** wanted to make sure her new address will be included. As of March 1st, she will be moving to Brookdale Westlake Hills, Apt. 135. 1034 Liberty Park Dr., Austin Texas 78746. Her only phone number will be 512-660-8266. She has enjoyed living independently for the past almost six -and-a half years, and the freedom that her car provided, but since her 90th birthday, family members have been gently nudging her to make a change. Although she acceded, regretfully, she sees it as being pro-active rather than reactive. Even though her decision to stop driving is voluntary, she admits to dreading that moment when she hands over the keys for the last time.

Whit and Betty Bodman (and their son-in-law **Greg Matthews**) are delighted to share this news on their



Ruth Koenig

daughter **Elizabeth Matthews**. **Elizabeth** is working hard to complete her doctoral degree in Social Work at Rutgers University in NJ. Having two young children, **Clara**, who is almost 4 and **Elsie**, who is almost 1, makes her time very precious. She started her job search at the beginning of the year hoping for a position at a university in the New York City area close to where she lives. She was pleased to get an interview and then a campus visit at Fordham University in Manhattan.

She was even happier when, at the end of the campus visit, she received an offer for a position in the School of Social Work to begin in the fall. Now all she has to do is finish that doctorate!

Carolyn Thompson reports that her thirteen-year-old granddaughter, Emily, went to Washington, D.C. over Presidents Day weekend for the Future Cities national competition. This is the second year in a row that her school's team has won first place in the New England regional division of this science/engineering/design competition. Emily is one of the presenters for her team from Somerville, MA. Future Cities is a project-based learning program where 6th, 7th and 8th grade students have to imagine, research, design and build a model of a city 100 years in the future. The project also teaches skills in decision making, compromise, and collaboration. Besides stressing clean energy, recycling, and a stable economy, each year the competition has a different theme. This year's challenge was to design an "Age Friendly City." The students had to identify any age-related challenge that exists in today's urban environments and engineer innovative solutions that allow their future city's senior citizens to be as active, independent, healthy and engaged as they want to be. Even though Somerville, MA did not win one of the top awards it was exciting to witness the poise, diligence and creativity of all the students. These young people do hold our future in their hands.

Nancy Edison reports, "Costa Rica and its people are wonderful! I just got back from 3 weeks there. The first 2 weeks were spent in Heredia taking Spanish lessons with Tico Lingo, a fairly new, small language school that makes arrangements with a nearby family for your lodging with breakfast and dinner included. My 'group class' ended up with two members, another girl and me. The third week was really a nine day guided trip with Caravan Tours which included rainforest hiking, a beach resort, a gondola ride above the rainforest, crocodiles as seen close up from a riverboat, and staying in very nice hotels, my favorite being the charming accommodations at the base of Arenal Volcano. All meals were buffet with much to choose from and included local foods as well. There were fruits I'd never heard of. ¡Bienvenido de nuevo de tu maravilloso viaje, **Nancy!** (photo on page 7)

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



2/18 Truly a room with a view—Nancy Edison's view of the Arenal volcano in Costa Rica from her room

Congratulations to the amazing **Nancy Brown** who celebrated her 98th birthday with a delicious luncheon at Pappadeaux's on Feb. 16th surrounded by 20 of her dear friends—most of them from her very active sorority Delta Sigma Theta, the Huston-Tillotson chapter. The party was hosted by **Catherine** and **Bob Lee** who have made Nancy a part of their family for many years. **Nancy**, a long-retired teacher who taught for many years at Oak Springs elementary sends her love to her friends at the Congregational Church of Austin. You can send her a belated birthday card or note at Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Room 511, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Drive, Austin, Texas 78753.



2/16/18 Sharon Brown helping Nancy Brown celebrate her 98th birthday. Note Nancy's birthday crown!!

History Corner

After WWII while Rev. Fred Cole was pastor, a basement addition was excavated under the Fellowship Hall (then the Student Lounge) with volunteer workers from the church (we don't remember who they were—does anyone?) removing the dirt using buckets and wheelbarrows (no information or pictures on where all of the fill was put!). Just imagine what the City of Austin permitting process might have been if something like that were attempted now! I wish I had thought to ask whose idea it was. Somewhere there are notes about the project, I think. A room of about 27' by 27' was created providing additional space for church school and fellowship dinners. There were two small Sunday school rooms and one slightly larger—a major drawback being that there were no windows. Under the sanctuary and the office there was the original basement which had a kitchen, a large meeting/dining area, and two small toilet rooms with sinks (the only toilet facilities for the building—accessed by going down the steep set of stairs).

For more church history, go to <http://server16.websitehostserver.net/~patandme/CCAHistory/index.html>.



About 1957 Cathy Hubbs teaching Sunday school to two little girls in one of the Sunday school rooms created when a new basement area was excavated by church members. * It is worth noting that Cathy, at age 95, is still singing in the choir every week!!