

May 2021

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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We are the United Church of Christ!

The United Church of Christ is a progressive Protestant denomination that boldly claims, “Our faith is 2,000 years old, but our thinking is not.” The UCC affirms that “God is still speaking,” and that we must be attentive to what God is saying by attuning our heads and hearts to the sacred Spirit. The UCC affirms that we have much to learn from the Bible, from other spiritual traditions, and from science.

The United Church of Christ is committed to working for justice, and it has a long history of doing so. From the abolitionist movement, to being first to ordain a woman, first to ordain a gay man and first to support marriage equality, to supporting economic, political and environmental justice, the UCC has a long history of being a progressive force among Protestant denominations in the United States.

The United Church of Christ offers all people an extravagant welcome by extending hospitality to all people as a sign of God’s inclusive love. No matter who you are, and where you are on your journey, the UCC welcomes you.

June Visitor Deadline May 25, 2021

Church Leadership

Deacons Chair	Jen Howicz
Outreach Team	open
Moderator	Joy Penticuff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Jaime Hadley
Christian Education Coordinators	open
Youth Sunday School	open
Clerk	Reuel Nash
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News

May

by Liz Nash

It is with joy that I announce the ordination of **Kerry Kirtley** by the Heart of Texas Association on Pentecost Sunday, May 23rd, at Touchstone Community Church in Boerne at 10:30 am, as the church gathers again to worship in person for the first time since March 2020. **Kerry**, who was approved for ordination last spring, is one of the two founding and current pastors of Touchstone, along with **Billie Watts**. She has waited to be ordained until it would be safe to meet. The church is working to have a hybrid service -- online and in person -- and we invite those of us who can be part of it to come and share in the celebration. Touchstone Community Church meets (in the past and when they reconvene) at Kronsby Place, 17 Old San Antonio Rd., Boerne, Texas. Look for the ordination news on their website, <https://touchstonecc.org/>.

At our Heart of Texas Association spring meeting, we held two Ecclesiastical Councils, voting during these to grant Privilege of Call in the United Church of Christ to **Amelia Fulbright** and **Sid Hall**. Privilege of Call is the process for bringing ordained ministers of a different denomination into full ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ. **Amelia** was ordained at First Baptist Church of Austin in 2007. She has served as the Associate Minister of University Baptist Church of Austin, as the Labyrinth Progressive Student Ministry founding minister, as sabbatical minister at Congregational Church of Austin, and (most recently) as the Designated Senior Minister at University Baptist Church during their transition time. **Sid** was ordained as an Elder in the United Methodist Church in 1986, has been the Lead Minister of Trinity Church of Austin (formerly Trinity United Methodist Church) since 1988, and serves on our Association Committee on Ministry. Sid is retiring from Trinity in July and will gain full standing in the UCC at that time. We welcome these two valued and respected colleagues to this new era in their ministries among us.

At our Association Meeting, **Charles Stark** and **Campbell Lovett** (our Interim Conference Minister) also educated those present about the possibility of a Unified Fitness Review Committee which would consist of members from all of the South Central Conference Associations and conduct clergy fitness reviews. These reviews occur when a complaint is raised about a clergy person that challenges their fitness to continue in ministry. Currently, these reviews are conducted by the Association Committee on Ministry. The purpose of having a Unified Committee would be to take the substantial burden of conducting fitness reviews off of the Association Committee to allow them to do the normal work they need to do. Our Committee on Ministry is still considering and doing “due diligence” to understand how a Unified Committee would work and will bring this possibility back to the fall meeting for consideration.

We have two clergy and church transitions to share. **Rene Slataper** has been called to be the Designated Term Pastor at Hope United in Georgetown, officially beginning his ministry on Easter Sunday. He also serves as Co-Pastor of Labyrinth Progressive Student Ministry, is now a Licensed Minister in the Heart of Texas Association, and is a Member in Discernment in the ordination process. **Nikki Stahl** has resigned as Associate Minister of United Christian in Austin, where she has served for the past 9 years. **Nikki** is taking a well deserved break as she finishes her excellent work at the South Central Conference Board President. Our prayers and blessings are with **Rene** and **Nikki** as they go forward in Christian ministry.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals by Pat Oakes

Betty Bodman is (at last) home from Montana. Being fully vaccinated, **Betty** flew home and although she was expecting to find the airports and planes relatively empty, they seemed to have a fair number of travelers. Not all plane seats were full, but except for middle seats, most seats were taken; everyone was masked but social distancing was often impossible or ignored. It is good to be home and to be re-arranging all of Whit's household organization which he perfected over the past 7 months. Betty has jumped into trying to mitigate the damage done to the yard by February's storm. Lots of work! Already wondering when she can get back up to Montana, **Betty** knows the twins will be totally different people by the time she sees them again.



3/30/21 The Bodman twins, Arlo on the left and Otis on the right, love playing together!

Don Miles will drive to celebrate his 85th birthday on May 16 with his grandson at Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. Grandson **Garrett Ritzman** has the same birthday and will be turning 30. **Don** has two other grandsons and a son-in-law working at the Pentagon. **Garrett's** brother **Austin**, who earlier served two tours in Afghanistan, is starting a Pentagon internship that should lead to a promotion to Major and a Master's Degree. **Austin** and **Garrett's** dad, **Marlin Ritzman**, is the FBI's man at the Pentagon right now, and **Don's** third grandson, **Christian Miles**, is working for a civilian contractor there after having served several years aboard a submarine in the Pacific. **Don's** daughter, **Juliette Ritzman**, is a retired Air Force Major who was deployed with her current National Guard helicopter

unit to Kuwait for eight months at about this time last year.

Dennis Murphy shares that **Nodie** is continuing to improve at home. He brought her home from the skilled nursing center where she was after a week there. He figured he could do what needed to be done as well as the folks at the nursing center—and very importantly, **Nodie** would be happier! While her progress is not exactly steady, she is slowly getting better. **Dennis**, you are our hero! **Nodie**, so are you! Do keep them in your prayers.

Kevin Dietz, when asked how things are going in their busy household, replies with a grin, “Crazy time!” His main words of advice are, “Don’t be in the situation of going to look at colleges during a pandemic.” **Rachel** and high school senior **Isabella** made a trip in mid-April to look at the University of Denver and two weeks later **Kevin** was taking **Isabella** to visit Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. She is also seriously considering Trinity University in San Antonio and Goucher College in Baltimore, MD. Twins **John** and **Francesca** are in the 9th grade at McCallum but attending classes online at home. **John** is playing JV baseball for McCallum and was delighted when not only his immediate family but his grandparents **Frank** and **Karen Dietz** showed up in Lockhart for a game in which **John** pitched a one-hitter **Rachel** (now fully vaccinated) is back teaching at Lamar Middle School. She went back just before the big February freeze intending to teach outdoors for better social distancing, but that was short-lived. In January, **Kevin** started a new job as deputy director at Texas Legal Services Center (tlsc.org)-- a not-for-profit group which provides legal advice, advocacy, representation, and education to underserved people. He works from home 4 days a week and goes in to the office one day a week.

Laura Hubbs-Tait had a wonderful, several days visit with her mom **Cathy Hubbs** here in Austin just before Easter. The isolation of the quarantine has been hard on **Cathy** as for so many. She was most delighted when **Laura** got to take her outside for a while where she enjoyed the breezes and the sunshine on her smiling face. **Laura** was required to wear a mask at all times, but **Cathy** was mask-free. During the visit—as they do almost every night on the phone

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

when **Laura** calls from Oklahoma—they recited the 23rd Psalm together, a lovely, quiet ritual for them for the past several years.



4/21 Laura Hubbs-Tait and her mom Catherine Hubbs
outside Westminster

Warinda Harris has been working closely with **Joy Penticuff** on Civic Academies through Central Texas Interfaith. She was particularly interested in one recent issue—community policing. She was encouraged to tell the organizing group how many of our church folks she thought she could guarantee to attend the Zoom meeting and, after thinking about it, she thought maybe 15. The issue of attendance is an important one as numbers tell the invited speakers how serious we are about issues. As the meeting drew closer we sent out an appeal to our membership—and instead of 15 attendees (already an ambitious goal), our little church had 30!! This was particularly heartening to **Warinda** as, at the last minute, she had to step in and co-chair the meeting. She could see smiling faces from the Congregational Church of Austin on the screen which gave her the courage and resolve to do the job that had to be done. Great work, **Warinda**!!

Barbara Burnham heard from **Chester Rosson** this past week that he had gotten his pathology report on his recent colon surgery. He has stage 2 colon cancer, but it has not metastasized—it was caught early. He will have chemo as a precaution, but

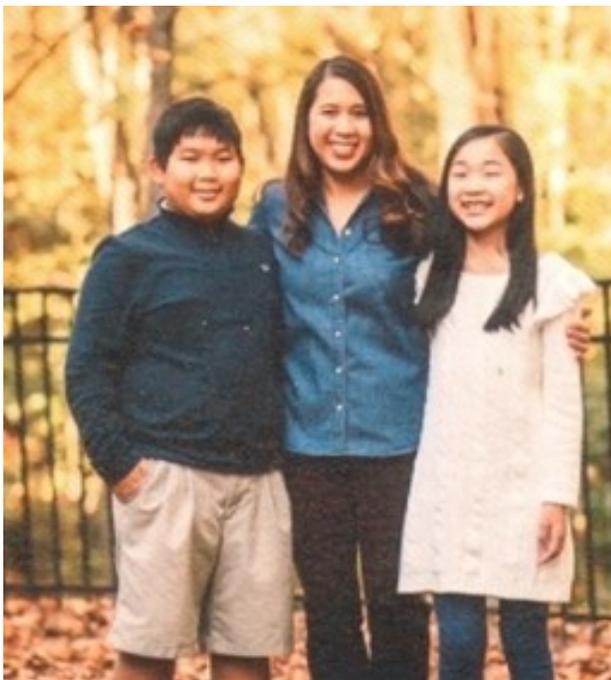
the doctor says if the chemo gets too grim, that he may fairly safely opt out. Their son **Robin** and daughter-in-law **Julia** and **Barbara** are encouraging him to come to Austin (where he has a relatively large support group) and be treated at Texas Oncology instead of being pretty much on his own being treated in Lufkin and commuting from his home in Crockett. The tumor was found in the same place where he had surgery 3 years ago when the surgeons found that he had (unknown to him) a burst appendix. On a much more fun topic **Barbara** had a great time at her first Project Linus group gathering (there were about 15 folks there) in more than a year. The organization makes handmade blankets for children in crisis. She took her own machine to the meeting and spent several hours sewing on Project Linus labels. She was really impressed with so many beautiful quilts with fancy stitching—thinking that perhaps, with the pandemic, folks had more time to work on projects of this sort. By the meeting's end, they had 275 blankets ready to go.

Jo Jensen and her husband **Bob Garrett** noted Washington's birthday on Feb. 22nd in a way they wish had not been the case. **Bob** was out in their back yard and stepped on a wobbly paving stone and fell. He called **Jo** who heard him but thought he was shouting NO to their dog **Winston**, but instead he was shouting **JO!** When she got out to the back yard, **Bob** asked her to help him get up. **Jo** took one look at his right ankle and said "We are calling EMS right now!" He broke the tibia and fibula in his leg right where they join the ankle, surgery ensued and the recuperation continues. They were delighted when all of the bandages came off to see that the incisions had healed beautifully. He is finishing up with PT sessions at home and soon will going to more outpatient PT. He is in good spirits and celebrated his birthday on April 21st.

Ruth Koenig, like so many, was heartsick at the murders in March in Atlanta of 8 people, 7 of whom were women and of those, 6 of them were Asian. She is concerned, too, about the rise in anti-Asian incidents in this country. She recalled that St. Paul's (Catholic) Church in Danville, IL where she and her husband were living at the time, were looking for other churches to join them in sponsoring South Vietnamese families who were fleeing when

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

the North Vietnamese drove them out during the 1970s. These were literally “boat people.” **Ruth** and her husband volunteered and hosted a young couple for two months. The young man was a promising surgeon who had been promised by an American doctor that if he could get to the US after the war, he would help him get established in a medical practice. He was able to assist in surgery in a local hospital in Danville, and **Ruth** helped him with English. The American doctor did come through on his promise. The Vietnamese doctor has since died but his daughter, conceived in Danville, went on to become an optometrist and she and her husband have a practice in an Atlanta suburb. She still corresponds with them at holiday time. **Ruth** says that they are personal examples of the countless immigrants who flock to this country and the contributions they make to our economy and our society. **Ruth** was absent from church on Sunday the 18th of April as she was involved in an extended family gathering on Zoom as they remembered the life of her daughter-in-law **Barbara’s** mother who died a few months ago just shy of her 100th birthday. The family celebrated her life on her special day.



12/2020 Ruth Koenig's good friends whose parents/ grandparents came to the U.S. from Vietnam (Phi Phi, center, Caleb 12, and Emily, 10)

Dave Ross had an unpleasant surprise about 3 a.m. on the Monday morning after Easter. He and **Sara** were awakened by the sound of large vehicles and the flashing of lots of lights very near their house. They knew that their neighbor had had recent heart surgery, so **Dave** decided to get up and see what was going on. As he was going down the stairs, he missed the last step on the landing, lurched, and banged his rib cage hard into the railing. On that Tuesday he went for some X-rays and found that he had 3 cracked ribs. He knows he is lucky that that was all he broke! He reports that he is coming along nicely (their neighbor is doing OK, too) and that he should be just fine in a few more weeks.

Jonathan Geer reports that he and **Roberto Hernandez** were finally able to go visit **Roberto's** family in Mexico and introduce them to their daughter **Xitlali**. They've done countless FaceTime calls with them, but they had yet to meet her in person so it was exciting for all of them to finally spend some time together. They usually drive since it is only a 6 hour trip to Monterrey from Austin, but they had to fly because of Covid 19. They allow flights into Mexico, but no crossing by land (unless you're a citizen of course). It's a short flight (just an hour) and **Xitlali** slept through the whole thing on the way there and back. She got to have an extra very belated birthday celebration with a delicious cake and such a big piñata that it took the whole family to bring down. They spent about 10 days there and **Xitlali** had a blast hanging out with the family and soaking up all that Spanish. She even took some of her first steps! It was hard to leave, but they are still keeping in touch almost everyday with FaceTime calls so she can remember everybody.



3/12/21 Xitlali at the airport ready to take off for Monterey with her dads

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes



3/12/21 Xitlali enjoying a snooze on the short flight to Monterey



3/14/21 Intrepid Xitlali enjoying a horseback ride with her dad Roberto in beautiful Monterey

Pam Tucker writes, "**Savanna** can convince me of anything. She knows me well and she knows what works. So, sometimes I try to head off any requests before she has a chance to bring them

up. "You won't need a car at college. There is no place to park and you can walk everywhere you need to go. If you want to go off campus, use public transportation." All fine and no complaints or mention of a car for the first semester. She had made the rowing team in the fall as a walk-on and I knew she had early morning and late afternoon practices, six days a week. She had called me many times on her 20-25 minute walk to and from the boathouse (she says it's the same boathouse the guys used who won the Olympics in 1936), many of those times in the dark. Still no complaints or requests for a vehicle. She knows those tactics would never work on me. Instead, in January, she started telling me about the break-ins and the assaults that have been happening on and around campus, and that it would be so nice to drive to and from practice. I reminded her that she would have no place to park. Of course, she had already had an answer for that. "Mom, as an athlete, I get a free parking pass." I still didn't take the bait. The final straw was learning that several girls from her sorority were walking her to practice in the morning and meeting her to walk her home in the evenings. She told me that eventually they will get tired of waking up so early. That did it. I started making plans of how to get the Jeep to her in Seattle. I decided to drive. I left on a Friday afternoon and made it to Lubbock. There was supposed to be a terrible winter storm in the Rockies that weekend. I had originally planned to go north through Colorado, but changed plans to go west to Gallup, NM and then north to try to get behind the front. The 1997 Jeep Wrangler has no cruise control, an air conditioner and heater that work fine if it is not more than + or - 10 degrees from comfort, and a 4 cylinder engine. It is great for climbing mountain roads, but is a lot of work driving on the highway, especially in snow storms. After long driving days on Saturday and Sunday, I made it there Monday afternoon. I knew that I would not get to see **Sav** much since she had strict requirements to stay safe regarding COVID (because of the team). I brought my new goldendoodle puppy, Piper, on the trip--another reason **Sav** wanted me to drive, so she could see the puppy. **Sav** took the puppy to the house for two separate study sessions and Piper got to meet many of the girls. I stayed at the hotel recovering and taking a hot bath--I

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

still had no hot water at my house, so that was a real treat. **Savanna** and I did share two nice dinners together, but dining outside was VERY cold. On Wednesday morning Piper and I headed back in a rental car. The return trip was easy with a peppy car that could maintain the speed limit and had heat and cruise control. It helped that I was not driving through snow storms. 4300 miles in 7.5 days! **Savanna** can convince me to do anything.”



3/16/21 Savanna Tucker at her first regatta with the girls rowing team at the University of Washington



3/16/21 A chilly dinner outside with Savanna and Pam Tucker who had not worn her warmer coat

It was fun to catch up with **Tommie Pinkard** a week or so ago. She has a fabulous telephone (provided for free by the U.S. government through most audiologists) which makes conversation much easier. She is reluctantly giving her cat Zoroaster away as it seems that Zoroaster cannot resist knocking everything/anything off of a shelf or a table. She hopes to find a quiet dog to keep her company in the

near future. Residents at her retirement community are pretty much confined to their apartments at this point, but she is hoping that things will open up soon. She had a good, quick visit from her son **David**. He had rented a car to drive from Asheville to her place in Brevard, but when he got there all they had for him was a pick-up truck. He had no choice but to take it, but Tommie didn't get to go out and about as there was no way she could get up into the truck!! Son **Chris** is planning to come for a visit in the near future. She gets lonesome and would be delighted to visit with you. You can reach her at 828-884-8587.

Last month **Donna Cravens** shared a video of her two dogs romping in the snow after the February freeze. Star and Diamond were 10-year-old sisters from the same litter. The owner convinced Donna to take them both which she did. Donna enjoyed good times with them, but sadly **Diamond** died on Easter morning at the vet's who had stopped by on her way to church and who was with her when she passed. Star is blind and diabetic and looked for **Diamond** for several days, but now seems OK. Donna thinks she will get another dog after Star—but only one at a time.

Lucy Erda was not looking forward to passing the milestone of her sixtieth birthday alone. But the years of love and companionship from our church and others have taught her how to ask for what she needs, how to invite God more deeply into each moment, and how to accept and rejoice in every gift given. She was so pleased and surprised to find her mailbox full of beautiful cards and well wishes the day before her birthday, but she chose to wait until that fine birthday morning to open them! She is touched and looks forward to helping others find joy as many of us pass a second birthday in quarantine. She notes that this, too, shall pass. **Lucy** says, "Thank you for filling my birthday with joy." When she thought of what she really wanted most, she asked for companions to go walking with her. From Friday to Sunday, she spent blissful moments in conversation with friends on her favorite trails. She highly recommends it!

Beth Gleason celebrated her 70th birthday in Maine on April 15. It snowed for 2 of the 3 days she was in Maine, but it was wonderful for **Beth** to be

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

with her mother (93) and three generations of **Gleasons** over the following weekend. She had a great time, but notes that it's always good to be back in Texas.



4/15/21 Beth Gleason, birthday girl in Maine!



4/21/21 Pat Oakes in front of her house with her LBJ yard sign

Pat Oakes has not been out on her own during this quarantine time, but has driven with Mel in the passenger seat. She did, however, work up her courage to drive by herself to the LBJ Library parking lot on April 21st on the UT campus for a drive-by celebration of National Volunteer Week. At that time **Pat** was presented with a certificate and yard sign celebrating her reaching 2000 volunteer hours over the past 19 years of volunteering. The library/museum has been closed since early March of last year, but the docents have been kept busy learning and studying by watching a number of Zoom speakers on topics to do with the presidents, watching many other educational/historical programs, listening to podcasts, etc. She met with her fellow Thursday afternoon shift docent friends, they visited with others (all outside and masked), then drove to Central Market for lunch, and then drove home—out on her own for 2 1/2 hours—feeling fine!

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

When we left after church and fellowship time on Sunday, March 8, 2020, I am sure that none of us would have believed we would not be together for (now) more than a year to worship, sing, and pray—and visit—in person as we have done for so many years. Imagine at the time almost no one had any experience with Zoom. It will still be a while before we can get together, but I thought you might find it interesting to look at our church through the years.

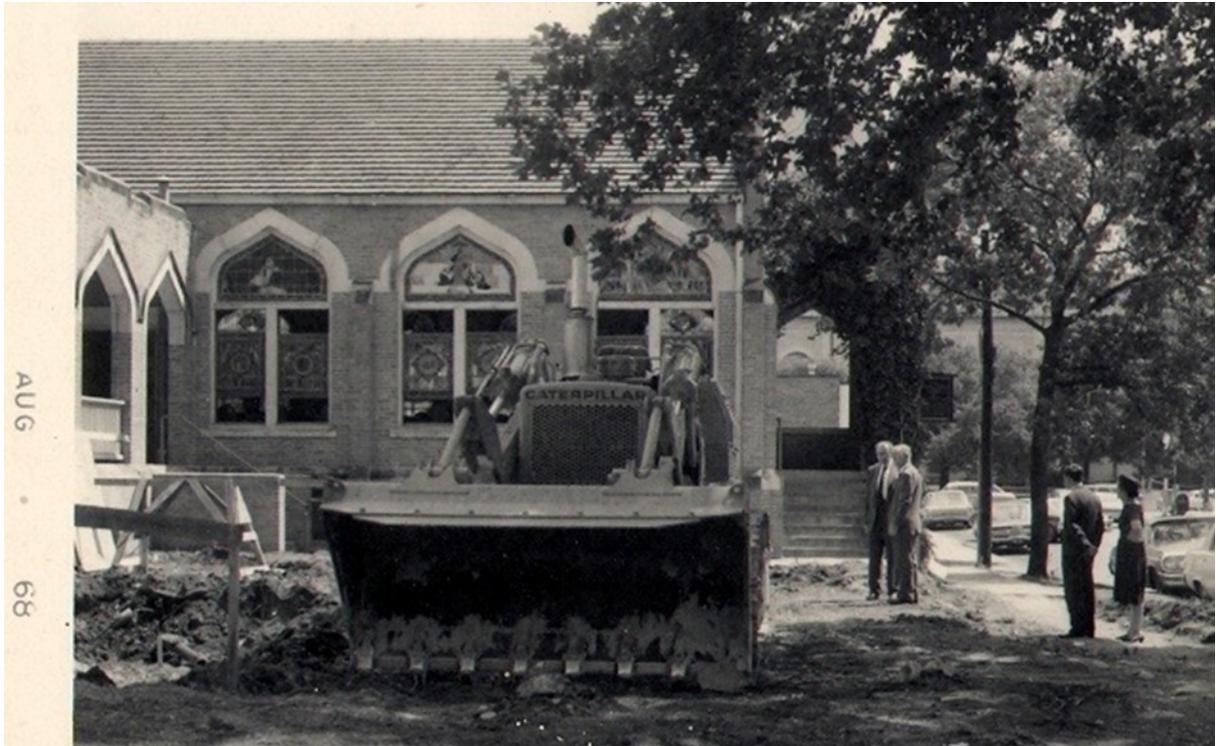


1923 Congregational Church of Austin--the corner of the parsonage is on the left, the building on the right must have faced Guadalupe.



About 1930 The old parsonage 23rd and San Antonio, Austin—it was torn down about 1968 to make room for the The Towery education wing. The house behind the parsonage is now a parking lot. The sanctuary is to the far right.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



Aug. 1968 Congregational Church of Austin--Construction beginning on the new Towery education wing--Van Courtright Walton is the man standing on the left and Will Warren near the bulldozer. Construction has started on rebuilding the patio--notice the windows are open since we did not have air-conditioning then.



3/4/01 The church in the springtime--Vic Appel's peach trees in bloom

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



7/17/06 A view from the reconfigured play area toward the Towery wing and the sanctuary

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



11/13/06 Church reconstruction/modification in process—the porch, arches, and columns were deteriorating, and the bricks needed repointing

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



11/13/06 Church reconstruction in progress—you are looking from the door of the nursery across the porch and at the doors we don't use very often—the prayer net is on the other side of the doors that you see.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



1/22/07 Church reconstruction continues —clearly progress is being made.



6/3/07 Work continuing on the patio at church making the sanctuary handicapped accessible from San Antonio St.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



6/10/07 Cathy Hubbs and Sara Ross as the construction gets finished. Go back and look at the level of the area to the left of the sanctuary and notice how much the area has been raised over the years.



5/23/08 Storm damage (a bad hailstorm broke many of the roof tiles) viewed from the back of the church

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



12/5/10 The church from the 3rd floor of the relatively new parking garage across the street—note new sidewalks and some new trees