

As Christians we place our faith in Jesus Christ, who nailed to the cross and dying called out to God, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Jesus uttered this prayer on behalf of the unrepentant perpetrators of his death, but many Christians interpret his words as a prayer for the entire human race: “forgive them, all of them, every last one, even the unrepentant, for they know not what they do.”

Peter once asked Jesus how many times he should forgive. Seven times? Jewish teachers taught that as a rule of thumb people should forgive three times. When Peter suggested seven he more than doubled that number, no doubt thinking he was being exceedingly generous. But Jesus answered, “not seven times, but seventy seven times,” or as some texts say, “seventy times seven.” In other words, forgive indefinitely. There is never a last time to forgive.

Forgiveness may lead us to the heart of Christian faith, but it is incredibly difficult to practice. It is hard to forgive people who hurt us, especially if they feel no remorse. It can be even harder to forgive people who hurt those we love, especially if the injured party is our child. Jesus knew himself as God’s child, God’s “beloved son.” He called God, *abba*, father. And with his last dying breath, he begged his father to forgive those who were hurting him and taking his life. Perhaps Jesus’ suffering on the cross reflects God’s agonizing act of forgiveness.

Lance Stone writes, “it hurts to forgive. It hurts to lay down that sense of grievance and resentment. If we are to forgive, something in us must die—and that is a very painful death, as if something in us is being ruptured and torn. We speak about the Christian life as one that involves taking up the cross, and here we encounter the cross—in the sheer pain of forgiving.”

H.R. McIntosh writes, “forgiveness is a voyage of anguish for the forgiver.” Reflecting on McIntosh’s words, Stone adds that “part of that anguish is the suspicion that to forgive is somehow to condone evil. To forgive is to fail to punish wrongdoing, and that can never be right...we can not allow evil to win, and forgiveness seems to risk that...we fear that to forgive is to allow evil to triumph.”

On the cross, nails piercing his hands, crown of thorns digging into his flesh, final breath gasping from his lips, Jesus Christ confronts us with a disconcerting, risky, mysterious reality—God forgives. Seventy times seven times. Never a last time. Even the unrepentant. In the face of recurring evil.

In his teaching ministry, Jesus Christ confronts us with another disconcerting, risky, mysterious reality—we too must forgive. We acknowledge this every Sunday when we pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

It is in forgiveness that we may encounter the pain of Jesus Christ’s cross and the reality of God’s presence most directly in our own lives, but it is in forgiveness that we may also experience the mystery of God’s resurrection of Jesus Christ to a new life. At its very deepest and most profound level, this is what Christian faith is really about—new life arising out of the pain and death of an old life.

May our journey through Lent and Easter bring us to Christ’s cross, and by Christ’s cross, to a new life.

TOM

OUTREACH ALERT

T-Shirts for Sale!!!

Assuming all goes as planned (i.e., silk screening at the Nashes on April 1), the new Congregational Church of Austin T-shirts should be available for sale as this newsletter hits the presses. We plan on selling the shirts for \$7 each, with ALL income going to Back Bay Mission as a supplement to the Church's line-item contribution. Extra donations for this cause will be very welcome.

Mt. Bonnell Cleanup

Our next Mt. Bonnell cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, April 8, a week before the Easter sunrise service. Please help us keep this Austin treasure looking great.

Front Porch Lunch update

MANY thanks to all who have donated generously to the Front Porch lunch, which we now serve to Lifeworks' homeless youth clients every 1st and 3rd Thursday. We're in the black for quite a while now, and will likely supplement the fund with savings left over from our Freeze Night line item (sparsely used because of the warm winter). Next year the Board of Christian Outreach plans on including the lunch in the Church's budget. The lunches are going very well, with a fantastic group of church volunteers and regular attendance of ~20 guests per lunch. Let John Goff know if you are interested in helping out in any way.

THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee reports a vacancy on the Board of Christian Outreach that all it's and other's efforts have yet to fill. Terms of service on this important Board are three years. If you are interested in serving, please contact Paul Deisler, sinprisa@earthlink.net. He will inform the other members of the Nominating Committee of your very welcome interest. If you would like to know more about the Board and its activities, contact John Goff, Chair, Board of Christian Outreach at goff@ig.utexas.edu for first hand information. Also, Paul Deisler can send you a copy of the formal description of the Board's work if you want one.

Chairs of our Boards

Trustees:	Reuel Nash
Deacons:	Betty Bodman
Christian Education:	Nancy Edison & Doyal Pinkard
Christian Outreach:	John Goff

Spring Retreat Date Set -- Mark Your Calendars

Join us at Slumber Falls Friday Camp near New Braunfels April 28-Sunday April 30. Carla Cheatham, a Houston seminarian and soon-to-be pastor will lead the adults in a study to discern our spiritual gifts. Planning is underway for children's

and youth activities. If you have questions or ideas, or just want to help, contact Marilyn Vache

We still need Sunday School assistants for the elementary Sunday School class. Please sign up and join the fun!!!

FROM THE TRUSTEES

You may have noticed a change in the way the offering plate is handled after Worship. The Trustees have implemented a policy requiring two members to count the cash together. We'll keep the cash counting records so a later audit can verify the correct deposit was made. Doing this protects the Church from embezzlement and protects the money handlers from false accusations. Lincoln, Cecile, and Lynne have been counting so far, but you may be asked to help if two of them aren't around.

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Sunday, April 9, 11:00 am, Palm Sunday with Children's Palm Procession

Join us we commemorate Jesus' procession into Jerusalem.

Friday, April 14, 7 pm, Good Friday Service

A service marking the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Sunday, April 16, 6:45 am, Easter Sunrise Service on Mt. Bonnell

A celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection with Rev. Emilee Whitehurst, Executive Director of Austin Interreligious Ministries as guest preacher, and Melanie Wilkinson as soloist.

Sunday, April 16, 11:00 am, Easter Service

A service in which we celebrate by bringing Christ's cross alive with living flowers to proclaim our faith in his triumph over death.

PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

Bill and Liz Spencer are enjoying their new environs in Lexington, Missouri. As an exploratory field trip, they went to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. Wow! What a place! They loved it! By the time you receive this, Liz's mom and faithful church attendee Jeanne Decker will have moved to Lexington to live near them. They will all be missed. The church bade a fond farewell to Jeanne during coffee hour after church on Sunday, March 12.

Nodie Murphy sent a note to reaffirm how great our trio was when it played for our church pianist Aaron Carter-Cohn's senior recital at Southwestern

on March 1st. Joining Aaron were violinist Andy Streitlemeier and cellist Robin Rosson. The first half of the concert was chamber music (even including Nodie on the flute in one section) and the second half was jazz as performed by the Southwestern Jazz Band with some guests (including our trio strings again). Some was music that was played in church last summer, but ALL the pieces were original compositions by Aaron. We are so blessed to have such gifted musicians in our midst. Nodie is trying to schedule a repeat of the concert at the church sometime this spring. Everyone should come because it is an eye-opening and ear-opening experience no one would want to miss.

The **Huston-Tillotson Masked Ball** was quite a success. A group from our church bought a table and a number of folks from the church were in attendance. Trustee Frances Alford and a friend were there as were trustee Nodie Murphy and Dennis and trustee Don Brown and Sharon and Fran and trustee Rambie Briggs. In fact, there was a lovely picture in the paper with Don and Sharon and frequent church attendee Derrick Evans. They all had a good time for a good cause.

Frances Alford reports that her husband John is doing so much better than he was a month ago. He was able to move back into his apartment at the Gaines Ranch and is doing physical therapy in the St. David's facility downstairs. He enjoys seeing Paul and Ellen Deisler every so often. John was well enough that Frances was able to go to Washington, D.C. for three days of meetings for the National Peace Corps Association. The Alford's beloved pet, Henrietta the Yorkie died in mid-March and they are feeling very sad about that. They will try to find another female Yorkie puppy soon.

Suzanne Vanderpoel is absolutely delighted. Over a period of 2 1/2 weeks in early March, she had cataract surgery in both eyes and can't believe the difference it makes. She reports that the world is a much lighter, brighter place now. She is looking forward to being able to read more, drive after dark, and other things she's missed.

Former members **Karl and Andrea Putz** are having a wonderful spring with their baby son. Murphy got his first two teeth (his front left on 3/5 and his front right on 3/10)! He had been teething for about 6 months, so it was such a relief for him (and them) when they finally came in. He is finally back sleeping through the night and is so happy. Andrea reports that the teeth are still too tiny to get a picture of, though. They did think of spring in Austin when it reached 60 degrees in the Chicago area in mid-March. They went to the beach near them and Murphy had a great time playing with (and unfortunately consuming some of) the sand.

Rizer Everett has been even busier than usual and has several restaurant recommendations for us, too. He enjoyed watching the Winter Olympic Games, built a fire in his fireplace in mid-February for the first time this winter, and then watched a Nova program on global warming, a phenomenon he wishes our leaders would note. He and his friend Johanna Householder enjoyed a delicious dinner at the Hyde Park Bar and Grill on Duval one evening and then he and another friend Mary Baltzer attended the end of session dinner of LAMP members that was held at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel that was renovated in

recent years. He was glad to see that the beautiful chandeliers in the ballroom have been retained and are as he remembers them when he was last in that room for members of The National Honor Society in 1933. Rizer enjoyed visiting relatives (his daughter-in law Connie Capen, granddaughter Lael and great-grandson Shane) and friends in late February-early March in the Tampa/St. Pete area of Florida, flying to and from, but renting a car for visits in the area. One afternoon he had a good visit with Lael, and his five-year-old great-grandson Shane who made the comment, "Tuan, you have done very well to live to be nearly ninety years old." The term "Tuan" means "Sir" and comes from the days when Rizer and his late wife Hildegard lived and worked in Indonesia 40 years ago. His children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren use the same form of address. He drove himself to the airport and arrived in Austin in time to pick up his car that had fenders painted while he was in Florida. He appreciated getting home and enjoying the different shades of color of the redbud trees in bloom.

New members **Cara and Jim Firestone** are looking forward to becoming parents in late June. Jim, who works for GSD&M, and Cara, who is a professional singer, are trying to figure out how life will be after the baby comes. Cara sang the role of Musetta in La Boheme in San Antonio in February and is now taking a break until well after the baby comes. She is scheduling concerts for 2007 when she will plan to take their baby boy with them. It turns out that most symphonies provide nannies for performers who are traveling with young children. Right now baby boy is not hearing full length roles, but is listening to Cara warm up with five note scales!

Pat and Mel Oakes enjoyed a week's visit with family and friends in Vicksburg, MS, Mel's hometown. He and his two brothers and Pat visited with cousins they had not seen in 60 years! They are in the process of planning an Oakes family reunion for Memorial Day weekend. Mel has gotten very interested in family history in his retirement and has spent hours on the computer tracking down relatives and encouraging them to share old pictures. He has set up an interesting Web site and has placed the old family pictures there for everyone to see. Prior to that trip, Mel and Pat enjoyed a Christmas present from their youngest daughter Mardie--she came for a long weekend to visit--a great gift. The week after Mardie's visit and just before going to Vicksburg, Pat spent 5 days visiting her dad in western North Carolina. They had a marvelous time going over Winter family pictures and Pat enjoyed hearing her dad tell stories of his youth and of his family.

Clark Hubbs has finished his chemo! On the last day the nursing staff doused Clark with confetti. They are still keeping Clark on a shorter leash than he and Cathy would like with appointments and tests, but it's a big improvement.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- 2 Ellen Luna
- 3 Mary Tomasek
- 4 Ricky Masters

- 5 Sarah Oakes
Katherine Anderson Ashton
- 10 Lynne R. Lemley
- 14 Susan Ashton
- 16 Eleanor Towery
- 22 Suzanne L. Bradford
- 24 George Lemley
- 28 Sarah Bentley

EASTER BASKETS FOR SHOAL CREEK

Easter Baskets are being assembled to give to the children at Shoal Creek this year. We need small gift items that are safe and small. Examples would be: toys, soft candy, small game books, stuffed animals and the like.

THANK YOU FREEZE NIGHT VOLUNTEERS

It's been a slow season for Freeze Nights, but the volunteers were ready to help! Thanks to: Cecile Adam, Matt Blackstock, Robin Chapman, John Goff, Will Heimbach, Jennifer Howicz, Dennis Murphy, Reuel Nash, Ellie Nash, Liz Nash, Doyal Pinkard, Tommie Pinkard, Sara Ross, Chester Rosson, Tom VandeStadt and Ben White

COFFEE HOUR

Please sign up in the Fellowship Room to be coffee hour hosts on an upcoming Sunday. The coffee hour time is such a good opportunity to visit old friends and meet visitors. We keep coffee and ginger ale and some punch fixings in the pantry in the kitchen. There are usually paper napkins, and we use coffee mugs and punch cups to avoid wasting natural resources. Your menu can be as simple or complicated as you want. Cookies and/or chips and salsa are just fine! If you have questions, talk to Pat Oakes, Tommie Pinkard, or Lynne Lemley.

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

A biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal exploration of Jesus' identity, and our relationship to him.

This spring, Whit Bodman and Tom VandeStadt are offering an adult education series that explores the identity of Jesus from biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal perspectives. The goal is to help folks in our church understand Christianity's interpretations and understandings of Jesus in different times and places, and to help us clarify and articulate our own relationship to Jesus. Whit and Tom are participating in a preaching series, and then hosting a bi-weekly discussion group from February to April.

The series is divided into six main topics: Jesus as *King of Kings*, Jesus as

prophet, Jesus as savior, Jesus as suffering servant, Jesus as God, and Jesus' question: "who do you say that I am?" After exploring the themes that coalesce around Jesus' various titles, folks will be encouraged to write a statement that articulates their own faith in Jesus.

Whit and Tom are taking turns preaching on these themes. The lessons' they'll be preaching on and the dates for the after worship discussions in April are as follows:

April 2, Jesus as God, Whit preaching,

After Worship Forum

Ps 82 Heb. 1:1-9

April 9, Jesus as God, Palm Sunday, Tom preaches

Colossians 1: 13-20 John 1: 1-14 or I John 1: 1-4

Plus a palm procession text from one of the gospels

Lenten Worship and Luncheon Friday, April 7, 11:00 am

Please join us for our now traditional Lenten worship service and luncheon on Friday, April 7, 11:00 am. The service and luncheon we held during Advent was well attended and those who participated enjoyed it very much. Again, we will make every effort to provide transportation to members and friends who cannot drive themselves, and we will serve a delicious meal following the worship service.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME!!!!

Don't forget to deal with all of your clocks for the beginning of Daylight Time. This year it begins at 2:00 am on Sunday, **April 2**.

HOPE AWARDS

Each year the Austin Area Interreligious Ministries (AAIM) grants Hope Awards to individuals or organizations who best exemplify our mission of bringing healing and hope to our community. This year, we are proud to give our Hope award to various segments of the faith community who responded in powerful and extraordinary ways to meet the needs of the Hurricane Evacuees who came to Austin.

When a city faces trials and tribulations, there is always a choice of how to respond. In Austin, the horrific disaster had the unlikely result of establishing cooperation between secular and sacred institutions as well as east and west side religious communities. Immediately following the crisis, it became apparent how vital the faith community is to our ability to respond in times of disaster. Thanks to the continued tireless work of the Hope Awardees, the city has had vital partners as we transition from immediate crisis management to long-term recovery. Because several individuals and organizations responded to the crisis

with dignity, diligence and of course HOPE, we have a larger number of Hope Award recipients than usual.

Come out to show your support to our faith community at AAIM's Annual Hope Award Celebration, on April 18, 2006, at St. David's Episcopal Church. For more information about AAIM's Annual Hope Award Celebration, please call 386-9145 ext18.

Deadline for May VISITOR — April 17