

THE VISITOR

December 2019

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

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



We're now in the Christian liturgical season of Advent. I find the whole phenomenon of "liturgical seasons" to be an interesting one. What are liturgical seasons, really? What are Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost?

One way to understand the liturgical seasons is to see them marking the various stages of Jesus' life and the Christian movement that arose from his life, death, and resurrection.

Advent—we prepare for Jesus' birth.

Christmas—we celebrate Jesus' birth.

Epiphany—we recognize Jesus as the manifestation of God's presence in human form.

Lent—we recall Jesus' time in the wilderness, and mourn his suffering and death.

Easter—we rejoice in Jesus' resurrection from death.

Pentecost—we celebrate the Christian church's birth and growth.

Yet another way to understand liturgical seasons is to see them as dimensions of our own spiritual life. For example, the Advent dimension of our spirituality is a way of discerning stirrings of new life within us and making preparations for its birth. These stirrings of new life may be experienced as mysterious acts of grace or as ancient hopes buried deep within our souls suddenly being fulfilled through no conscious act of our own. In Advent, we feel like we're the recipients of a gift, but we must prepare ourselves to receive this gift because we're the ones who'll care for whatever or whoever is born anew within us.

Another aspect of Advent spirituality is openness to signs, visions, and dreams, and heightened sensitivity to feelings, intuitions, and inner stirrings. In the lessons we traditionally read during Advent, note how signs, visions, dreams, feelings, and intuitions play a prominent role in the unfolding drama. In our own Advent experience, the new life that's stirring deep within our souls, way down below the radar of our conscious rational thoughts, may be communicating to us by way of visions, dreams, feelings, and intuitions.

Finally, it's important to remind ourselves that the Advent dimension of our spirituality can occur any time during the year. Just because the "liturgical season" of Advent falls on the calendar during December doesn't mean this is the only time we can focus on the Advent dimension of our spirituality or have a profound Advent experience. Advent spirituality—feeling the stirrings of, and preparing ourselves for, mysterious grace-inspired new life can happen any time of the year. As can a Lenten experience of letting go and dying to some old way. Or an Easter experience of being resurrected to new life. We follow the liturgical calendar throughout the year to remind ourselves that Advent, Lent, Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost are all particular dimensions of our on-going, year-round spiritual path. But at different times of the year, and at different points of our life's unfolding, we may focus more on one dimension of our spirituality than another.

I pray that for you, Advent will be more than the time of year when we replace green with purple, and more than a commemoration of an event that happened several thousand years ago. I pray that you'll experience the gift of grace stirring deep within you, and that you'll take the time to prepare yourself for the birth of something new in your life.

CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT SERVICE AND PARTY

On Sunday, December 15, at 7 pm, we will celebrate Advent and Christmas with our Annual Candlelight Service, followed by the Annual Christmas Party at church. The service includes readings from the gospels and the prophets, our favorite Christmas carols and hymns, and the lighting of our candles in the darkness. Afterward, we head into Fellowship Hall for our party. Please bring your singing voices, hearts and minds open to wonder, and some of your favorite festive food to share.

CHRISTMAS OPEN DOOR DINNER

If possible, please plan to participate in our Annual Christmas Open Door Dinner. This is a tremendously fun and joyous event that begins at 12:00 noon on Christmas Day with a brief celebration of Holy Communion. The meal begins around 12:30 pm. We simply open our doors, and anyone who wants to come in and join us can. The first year we did this we had about twenty-five homeless folks join us. Since then, we've had well over one hundred every year.

Here's a rundown of what we will need for Christmas day:

- Christmas Spirit: the desire to offer the gift of love and service to other people.
- Kitchen and dining room help: folks to heat up food in the kitchen, set tables, set the food out, help serve, sit with the guests and enjoy a great meal, and then clean up afterwards. You can come for the whole event or for just one hour or so—that's entirely up to you.
- Food Preparation: folks who can prepare food in advance, and then drop it off at church prior to the meal. Food includes vegetables, turkey, salads, and desserts.

Reuel Nash has once again generously offered to coordinate our meal this year. There are sign-up sheets in the Fellowship Hall for you to sign-up to bring food or to help with set-up, serving, and clean-up. Hot trays will also be available so you can prepare the food in the hot tray and bring it to church where we will keep it in the warming oven until it's served.

TOM

January Visitor Deadline December 24, 2019

Church Leadership

Deacons Chair	Barbara Burnham
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Dennis Murphy
Christian Education Coordinators	Bethany Leach
Youth Sunday School	Amy Kent Rivera
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News
December
by Liz Nash

At our Heart of Texas Association Meeting on Saturday, November 16th, we held two Ecclesiastical Councils, voting to approve the ordination of **Cam Burton** and to grant Privilege of Call to Rev. **Billie Watts**. I wrote about **Cam** and his chaplaincy at St. David's South Medical Center, Austin last month. **Billie** was recommended for Privilege of Call at our Heart of Texas Committee on Ministry meeting on November 5th, so her good news is more recent. **Billie** and **Kerry Kirtley**, who is in our Member in Discernment Process, are the founding pastors of Touchstone Community Church in Boerne, a UCC new church start that now has gone through the process with our denomination to become a UCC Church in Formation. **Billie** comes to us as an ordained United Methodist minister (an ordained United Methodist Elder), who took a leave of absence from active ministry to allow herself time to make the decision to change denominations. It is wonderful to welcome these very fine and gifted ministers as colleagues in ministry in the UCC.

After our meeting in a service that began at 3 pm, **Cam** was ordained at Trinity Church of Austin. Several who attended the meeting were able to stay for the service, and many of his friends in ministry came to be part of it. It was a great joy to affirm his call and to be part of supporting his years of work as a hospital chaplain.

Privilege of Call, which we granted to **Billie** at the end of her Ecclesiastical Council, allows a minister from another denomination to move into full standing in the United Church of Christ when that minister has a call to a UCC church. It is a full move into the UCC, with the minister giving up the other denomination as a place of ministerial standing. **Billie's** call is to ministry at Touchstone Community Church, which means she now has full standing in ministry in the UCC.

We also had another great joy to share at our meeting: that Touchstone Community Church has just received a \$40,000 New and Renewing Spiritual Communities grant from the national UCC, using funds from the Strengthen the Church offering that many of our churches support. This is an enormous "leg up" to Touchstone, and involves finding matching funds for part of the award. Both Touchstone and Open Cathedral have now been recipients of substantial grant money from the UCC. The enthusiasm and hard work of these new communities among us is an inspiration as they seek to give an extravagant welcome to all who come to be among them.

We made two other significant decisions at our Fall Meeting. First, we voted to give \$8,750 from our Association funds in travel scholarships to the UCC National Youth Event next summer, using money that we set aside each year for youth events. This money will be divided up and distributed equally to all who register by the NYE deadline. If our numbers are similar to those in the past (approximately 70 from this Association), we expect to give travel funds of about \$125 per person. Second, we voted to continue our support and practice of Licensed Ministry as the other South Central Conference Associations have done. The new Manual on Ministry for the United Church of Christ moves away from supporting Licensed Ministry, but we have a strong and faithful group of Licensed Ministers who have served our churches well and have offered great vitality to our Association. We appreciate them and want to continue to support their work.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

AUSTIN INTERFAITH - DELEGATES ASSEMBLY HELD NOVEMBER 10, 2019

Many readers of the *Visitor* are aware that Congregational Church of Austin is a long-standing member of Austin Interfaith, a coalition of faith congregations and non-profit service organizations that together work for social justice. On Sunday, November 10th, Austin Interfaith held its annual Delegates Assembly at St. David's Episcopal Church in downtown Austin, and over 300 members of the coalition churches and non-profits attended this important annual event. Leaders gave reports of the social justice work accomplished during the past year, highlighting successes including:

- Advocacy to secure \$2.5 million in state, county, and city funding for Capital IDEA, which moves people out of poverty into well-paying careers like nursing and IT, through community college education,
- Community Policing Civic Academies bringing APD officers and community groups together to develop trust, mutual goals, and safer neighborhoods,
- Monitoring law enforcement through work with police chief Manley and APD administrators including the APD Office of Community Liaison,
- Initiation of work with county judges and the new public defenders office to begin steps to improve the region's criminal justice system,
- Advocacy for the homeless to bring about more humane treatment for people living on the street,
- Collaboration with Austin City Council to increase the amount of affordable housing available to people living below 60% of Austin median income and to ensure that the funds are spent appropriately,
- Work to ensure that hard-to-count populations (e.g. the undocumented, homeless) are counted in the 2020 Census,
- Outreach to undocumented people through the *Recognizing the Stranger* and *Know Your Rights* leadership training programs,
- Attendance of Austin Interfaith leaders at the Dr. Joyce James two-day workshop on racial equity, Initiation of a working relationship with Huston-Tillotson administration, faculty, and students to enhance leadership training for social justice.

Additionally, delegates affirmed the Agenda of Issues that will focus the work of the upcoming year. Finally, the Delegates Assembly celebrated the launch of Central Texas Interfaith, which includes the geographical area of Austin Interfaith's original five counties and expands our social justice efforts into five new counties to comprise a ten-county area covering Central Texas.

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**AUSTIN INTERFAITH DELEGATES
ASSEMBLY, CONT.**



11/10/19 Central Texas Interfaith Delegates Assembly, the CCoA delegation --l-r--Bill Beardall, Joy Penticuff (who wrote the great summary on the 1st page), Whit Bodman, Andrea Low, Lynne Lemley, Reuel Nash, Greg Callahan, Lynn Chavaria, Jen Howicz, Liz Nash and Ruth Koenig (Pam Tucker came later)

Personals by Pat Oakes

A wonderful memorial service was held for **Vic Appel** on Sunday, November 10th (appropriate as **Vic** was a veteran), after the morning service. A light lunch was served at coffee hour before the memorial service started at 1:30 pm. **Vic's** daughters **Cheryl** and **Debbie** had brought a memorable collection of old photos of **Vic's** life which everyone enjoyed seeing. **Vic's** younger brother **Bruce** came from California and spoke lovingly about his big brother and shared stories of their youth. **Vic's** three children, son-in-law **Robert Knowlton**, and three grandchildren, and members of the congregation spoke about the impact **Vic** had on their lives and on our church. As the service ended, Pastor Tom presented **Greg, Cheryl, and Debbie** each with a red rose, a reminder of how much **Vic** loved nature and gardening.



11/10/19 Siblings Greg Appel, Cheryl Appel, and Debbie Appel-Knowlton spoke eloquently about their dad Vic at his memorial service



11/10/19 Cheryl Appel with her nephew Sam and niece Emily reading a poem Vic loved with some of the words left out--how they worked to help Vic's memory

Congratulations to **Joy Penticuff** and her horse, **Armani**, who won a first place ribbon and a second place ribbon in a competition over fences at the Serendipity Farms horse show in Austin November 16th. **Joy** was competing with eight other riders. **Joy** was delighted that **Betty Bodman** was there to help cheer her and **Armani** on. Do note that **Joy** is wearing a helmet and wears a special vest that she attaches to the reins should she start to fall. The vest inflates and acts as a sort of air bag should that be necessary. Safety first!



11/16/19 Joy Penticuff with her horse Armani talking with the judge at a recent horse show

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

Barbara Johnson (mother of **Warinda Harris**) celebrated her 70th birthday on October 26th with 100 of her nearest and dearest family and friends in her hometown of Lake Charles, LA. A good time was had by all as they sang and danced the night away, feted **Barbara** with a rousing rendition of **Stevie Wonder's** "Happy Birthday," and closed the evening with a New Orleans-style second line (with Barbara at the head of the line), complete with handkerchiefs and a giant feather fan!

It was great to see **Frank Dietz** at church with his son **Kevin**, the morning after **Kevin** received the individual Lotus Award for 2019 from the Asian Family Support Services of Austin (AFSSA) reported on in the November Visitor. **Kevin** and **Rachel** and **Karen** and **Frank**, visiting from New Braunfels, enjoyed the event very much and were very impressed with how many folks were there. Frank served as our interim pastor for several months in 2009 when **Tom** was on sabbatical.



11/3/19 Frank Dietz and his son Kevin enjoyed a cup of coffee after church in early November

The congregation has really missed the choir which was on a prolonged hiatus—the usual summer break and then the time it took for choir director **Nodie Murphy** to recuperate from her recent knee replacement. So it was with great joy that we listened to them sing a Reformation arrangement, complete with a syncopated drum beat of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" on the 17th of November. **Nancy Edison** is a welcome addition to the choir.

Michael Ross (in town to visit his folks and brother **Andy**) joined in with the choir on Dec. 1 at the end of his Thanksgiving break.



11/17/19 The choir is back! Sara Ross, Dennis Murphy, Don Miles, new choir member Nancy Edison, Chester Rosson, Barbara Burnham, Amy Harris and choir director Nodie Murphy (playing a drum)—now back leading the choir after recuperating for several months with her new knee

Here's an update from **Marilyn Vaché** who has bought a house in New London, CT. "I'm happy in my new home. **New London** is an actual city — with an arts center, diversity, three colleges and two branch campuses, unlike most rural towns in Connecticut. But it's small enough to be friendly: I went to the symphony's first concert recently and a Board member asked me to call her about becoming a member! It's a wet climate but relatively mild with a long growing season, and there are lots of people to teach me how to garden here. I am getting ready for my next job, telemedicine three weeks a month and on site one week a month in Santa Paula, California (between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara). I am participating in a Quaker spiritual formation class <http://woolmanhill.org/upcomingprograms/nurturingfaithfulness/> and am active in my local Quaker meeting. All in all, privileged and grateful. The only thing missing -- my lovely friends at CCA-UCC!" We miss you, too, **Marilyn!!**

Nurse **Debby Kohrt** had another successful mission in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. She notes that it is such an honor to be with this group. It is hard work, but so rewarding! The mission was October 26th to November 2nd.

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Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



11/2019 The Smiles International team in Cabo San Lucas-Debby is in the front row, 3rd from the left.

Our stellar office manager **Donna Cravens'** recent eyelid surgery went perfectly, just as it was planned according to the plastic surgeon. The surgeon did a great job and then promptly flew off to Nashville to spend Thanksgiving with her family. **Donna** was the LAST person she fixed midday Wednesday 11/27. As she was cutting and sewing, she told **Donna** that she graduated from Vanderbilt University and then moved here for the weather. **Donna** didn't even have black eyes which she was warned about. The worst part was the rest of Wednesday afterwards and the next day. Lying around with frozen peas on her face (for swelling) was just not her idea of fun!! The surgeon said that frozen peas work better than crushed ice, but **Donna's** friend who accompanied her could only find 'mixed vegetables' on their way back to her home. So that's what she used. She does have pictures, but they are only for her family out of state!

Mel and Pat Oakes had a lovely 3 day visit with **John and Susan Richmond** just prior to Thanksgiving. **John and Susan** are the wonderful friends from San Francisco who have let **Mel and Pat** housesit in their home for several weeks the past two summers while they are traveling. It is definitely a win-win situation for both couples—the **Richmond's** have their home, 1 block from Golden Gate Park, taken care of and **Pat and Mel** get out of the Texas heat while seeing their youngest daughter **Mardie** and bonding with their 7-year-old grandson **Durham**.

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



11/24/19 Nodie Murphy and Catherine Hubbs enjoyed a visit on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Cathy's daughter Laura Hubbs-Tait was in town for the holiday to celebrate with her mom

Congregational Church of Austin Member Activity Directory

In order to support more social activity among church members and friends of the church, an activity directory is now available. Activities currently listed are: Holiday Meal, Holiday Leftover Meal, New Recipe Meal, Friendship Meal, Hymn Sing, Board Game Night, Jam Night, Retreats, Beer/Wine/Scotch Tasting, Holiday Treat Bakeoff, Kayaking, Holiday Meal, Cookies Exchange, Sporting Events, and Movie Night. Members are encouraged to suggest other activities that would be of interest to them.

Access to this page requires a link and a password. Both are provided to members in the Newsletter, the weekly editions of CCA E-NEWS, or members may contact the Church Secretary.

Link to Directory: <https://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/2314-2/>
Password: CCoAMAD

The link to the directory page can also be found under the navigation menu, "Ministry", found on any page of the church website,

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Super sleuth **Mel Oakes** found this interesting article about the People's Community Clinic in 1980. Those of us who were at the church at the time used to laugh and say that ours was the only church in town where one could go to church on Sunday and come back during the week to find out if one was pregnant. It truly was an amazing outreach program that did a lot of good for the Austin community. In 2020, People's Community Clinic will celebrate its 50th year in its vastly expanded facility—no longer in our basement!

People's Community Clinic has recovered from old image

By LINDA ANTHONY
American Statesman Staff

It's come a long way since patients stood in a line that circled the block, waiting to enter what was then the city's only free health care clinic.

In the 10 years since the People's Community Clinic opened, services have expanded to include pediatrics, general medicine, teen and pre-natal care.

"We're no longer the stereotypical hippie clinic. We see patients ranging from one day to 67 years of age. We've got young kids, teen-agers, entire families, the poor and the old who come in for their health care," said acting clinic director Mim Carlson.

But shaking the old image hasn't been easy.

"In 1970, there were a lot of people who dropped out with no place to go. There were more hippies than transients, and there were a lot of services the University wasn't providing, such as birth control.

"There was no place for people to get those services without going through a lot of hassle first. The idea of opening a place that would alleviate that sort of snow-balled, and we opened in the basement of the Congregational Church," said John Whitaker, one of the clinic founders.

In its infancy, the clinic's methods and facilities were less than sophisticated.

"All we had were mattresses on the floor, old exam tables and lab equipment that we'd scrounged for.

"I remember examining new pelvises (giving a patient a pelvic exam) on the ledge of the women's bathroom. Since we couldn't keep medicine on the premises, we used to haul stuff in and out in old liquor cases. Nobody got paid. It was an all-volunteer effort. We did the best we could and had a lot of fun doing it," said Whitaker.

But those early years were touch and go, and it wasn't until 1972 and a visit from what was then the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, that the clinic was assured it would stay in the business of providing low-cost health care.

Ironically, the same agency that gave the clinic the financial basis to eventually open five days a week, (now known in part as the office of Health and Human Servi-



Patrick Larkin works in the clinic's pharmacy.

ces), may close during the next round of doling out the federal dollar.

"When we first got our grant from HEW, it was during the time of many federal giveaway programs," said Carlson. "It's not that way anymore. We're terribly afraid of funding cuts because that's where the majority of our money comes from."

It was the initial grant from HEW that allowed the clinic to expand its birth control program and begin a clinic for teens.

In 1974, the city followed by providing a grant for a

general medicine clinic. The late pre-natal clinic is funded by the county; and state funds (Title XX) are used for family planning, bringing the clinic's annual operating budget to nearly \$270,000.

That's quite a change from the early days, when operating capital came from fundraising parties and donations from physician's patients. One of the clinic's earliest financial supporters was the flamboyant madam Hattie Valdez.

"She had been a patient of mine for years and was one of the clinic's biggest backers," said Whitaker.

But the clinic's financial health is still precarious.

Because of the clinic's unusual structure, expenses are at a minimum. Although there are 13 budgeted positions, all the staff are paid the same amount.

"Having a collective and non-differential pay scale helps people accept responsibility in all areas of the clinic. They think of it as theirs," said Carlson.

They also value an individual's initiative and opinion.

"It's a flexible and relaxed atmosphere. We can change direction or start a new program almost instantly," said Carlson.

Examples of this flexibility include the recently added late pre-natal and teen clinic.

The late pre-natal care clinic began several years ago when staff noticed a large number of young women, mostly teen-agers, coming in for checkups who hadn't previously seen physicians.

"Though we didn't have the money, our staff volunteered time over and above their usual work week. Thankfully, we got funded by the county," said teen services coordinator Georgia Milan.

The staff also offers Lamaze method, sexuality, parenting and fertility awareness classes, all on a sliding fee scale. They also offer a number of workshops on adolescent health concerns, values clarification and birth control.

"We try to be as flexible as possible. We're more of a comprehensive clinic. We're serious about the quality of medical care we provide while trying to preserve the element of caring for people as whole individuals and not some disease that walks in the door," said lab technician Patrick Larkin.

6/24/1980 Austin American Statesman article on the People's Community Clinic which started in our church basement, 408 W. 223rd St., in 1970