

# THE VISITOR

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

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



**I**n the gospels, John the Baptist is the herald, the messenger who announces the arrival of the messiah. So I love the story in Luke's Gospel in which John begins to fulfill his spiritual vocation even before he's born (Luke 1: 39-45). John is within Elizabeth's womb. When Mary shows up for a visit with Jesus in her womb, John announces Jesus' arrival by leaping inside Elizabeth. Jumping around inside her, there's no way Elizabeth can ignore her child.

And that's just the type of guy John turns out to be after he's born—a guy nobody can ignore. When John grows up, everyone knows what John is doing out on the banks of the River Jordan—he's announcing the arrival of the messiah. Just as he did in Elizabeth's womb before he was born.

In creating this story, Luke is telling us that God destined John to be the messiah's herald, not from the moment he was born, but *before* he was born. Yet it's good to remember that Luke's story is myth, not an historical account in the way we think of historical accounts today. We're not to take the story literally as something that actually happened, though it may point to something we recognize as true. What seems to be true about John is that a spiritual vocation gripped him so deeply and powerfully that he gave his life to fulfill it, as if God destined him before birth to be "John the Baptist."

During Advent, I encourage you to think of your life in mythic terms. Who did God destine you to be, even before you were born? You need not literally believe that God pre-destined your life to be someone or do something in particular. But take time to reflect on your soul's deepest calling, and how you've responded to your soul's call throughout your life, from childhood till now.

Psychotherapist Bill Plotkin writes of the soul's call: "The soul doesn't say, 'Be a writer or an artist' or 'Become a physician' or 'Go into politics or business.' It certainly doesn't declare, 'Make lots of money.' We might imagine a memo from the soul to the ego: 'You were born with a certain image or story line, one that you've begun to uncover, and you possess certain soul powers (core abilities, knowledge, and values). These are your gifts to bring to the world and your tools for embodying them. Now you must determine which settings and roles, among those available to you in your time and culture, will allow you to carry these gifts to your people. You might even have to invent a new role. My primary task has been and remains to help you discover your ultimate place and your true gifts. Your task is to embody them.'"

John was a herald and a prophet. Maybe you too are a herald, destined to bring a message to the world. Or maybe you're a healer. A care-giver. A wisdom-teacher. A creative artist. A prophet of justice. An organizer. A loving parent. A good neighbor. A non-anxious presence. There are so many holy vocations—at least one for each of us.

Think mythically about your life—before you were even born, God destined you to be someone or do something. You feel this vocation deep in your bones, your heart of hearts, your soul. Don't confuse the job

someone pays you to do for your soul's vocation or your destiny, but instead reflect on how your job may be a vehicle for your soul's expression, or perhaps an obstacle. In the myth of John the Baptist, God destined John to be the messiah's herald. In the myth of your life, what is your destiny?

**TOM**

## **January Visitor Deadline December 28, 2020**

### **Church Leadership**

Deacons Chair	Faye Dierksen
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	Joy Penticuff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Dennis Murphy
Christian Education Coordinators	Jaime Hadley
Youth Sunday School	Amy Kent Rivera
Clerk	Reuel Nash
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

**Heart of Texas Association News**  
**December**  
**by Liz Nash**

**O**n the fourth Sunday of November, I watched the Facebook link to the worship service at the Union Congregational United Church of Christ in Angels Camp, California. The church is a small congregation in a rural town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. My dear friend and mentor, Rev. Dr. **Sally Smith**, was being honored in celebration of the 50th anniversary of her ordination -- an extraordinary milestone for anyone but even more so for a woman ordained in 1970. I could not be there in person because of the distance and difficulty traveling now. I also could not be there because I live in an area where the COVID counts are extremely high and would be bringing that risk into an area with far lower case counts and, in the process, endangering a 90 year friend along with the congregation honoring her. But the blessing was that I actually could be part of the congregation that day. In this week of Thanksgiving as I write, I am so very grateful.

I share my experience for two reasons. First, to highlight the creative ways we have learned to bring people together in worship during this difficult year and second, to encourage us to understand some of our differences.

In our Association, our urban churches are meeting almost completely by Zoom, on YouTube, by Webex, or using a similar online platform. These churches are all currently in high danger COVID areas. A few of these who have a good space for an outdoor service have taken the opportunity to worship once or twice in that way, while also putting up the cameras and microphones to include those who could not be present -- quite a feat. A few of our churches have worshipped in person for a short time, and then stopped when the COVID counts locally went up. Several of our more rural churches have been meeting in person for quite a while. These are in areas where the pandemic has not hit as hard or not much at all. We have one church who broadcasts to cars outside via the car radio, and has met inside on and off as the local case counts went down and then back up. Other churches did drive-up services before beginning to meet in person.

Our circumstances are different right now. From listening to those I know and care about, I know sometimes these varying circumstances are hard to understand. For those of us living in a large city, COVID is very present and gathering in a group is dangerous. For those of us living in rural areas, COVID is not as present. We are a diverse church in many ways, and this difference now in how we worship is part of that diversity. For me, I found a lifegiving and creative bridge between two ways of doing church as my friend was honored last Sunday. Thanks be to God for that bridge. In this time of polarization in our society, I invite us to choose to appreciate each other.

Our friends at Hope United in Georgetown have welcomed Rev. **Remington Johnson** as their designated pastor at this time of change for them. Rev. **Johnson** is a Presbyterian minister with substantial experience in hospice care and chaplaincy in the Austin area. We offer our prayers and hope that her ministry with Hope United will be a faithful and enriching time.

Blessings in Christ,  
**Liz Nash**, Association Minister

**Personals**  
by Pat Oakes

Friday, Nov, 27th, the day after Thanksgiving, dawned as a dreary and drizzly morning, but folks from church and family and friends of **Faye and Andy Dierksen's** (all on Zoom, of course) didn't really notice a bit. It was a joyous, meaningful, unique service in the time of Covid-19. With Pastor **Tom** leading the 10 a.m. service in the **Dierksens'** back yard, socially distanced, of course, and **Andy** holding an umbrella, **Deek Charles Dierksen** (named for his great-grandfather) was baptized and brought into the church family. **Deek's** godfather is **Faye's** older brother **Jack**

**Wefso** who was on Zoom from Baltimore and his godmother is **Andy's** younger sister **Margaret "Maggie" Suchy** on Zoom in rural Nebraska near Lincoln. Because **Deek** was bundled up since it was wet and cool, we did not get to see the heirloom christening gown he was wearing, but you can see **Deek** wearing it in the photo. **Faye** shares that his gown was her paternal grandmother **Mildred Wefso's** gown. She wore it, **Faye's** father and aunt wore it, both of **Faye's** brothers and **Faye** wore it, and now **Deek**—the 4th generation to do so.



11/27/20 About 20 church members and friends gathered on Zoom with Faye and Andy Dierksen, their infant son Deek, and Pastor Tom VandeStadt for a slightly rainy, backyard, socially distanced memorable service of baptism the day after Thanksgiving



11/27/20 Faye holding Deek and Andy holding an umbrella while Tom led the service of baptism for Deek Charles Dierksen--Andy baptizing his son



11/27/20 Faye and Andy with Deek inside after the baptism visiting with folks on Zoom

**Personals (cont)**  
by Pat Oakes



11/27/20 Deek Charles Dierksen wearing his heirloom christening gown



11/3/20 Sara and Andy Brown with their children Hattie 5 1/2, and Franklin 4, on Election Day

At noon on Tuesday, November 17, **Don** and **Sharon Brown's** younger son was sworn in as Travis County Judge by former Travis County Judge **Sam Biscoe**. The ceremony was carried live and on Zoom by the Travis County Commissioners' Court with very few in-person participants. Both **Hattie** and **Franklin**, **Don** and **Sharon's** grandchildren, comported themselves very well during the brief swearing-in service. Sadly, **Sharon** and **Don** were not able to attend in person, but were among the many who watched on Zoom. After Judge **Andy's** speech, many elected officials were recognized as being present including **Sarah Eckhardt** and **Kirk Watson**. Both **Lloyd Doggett** and **Beto O'Rourke** made statements celebrating **Andy's** achievements and wishing him well.



11/17/20 Andy Brown was sworn in as the new Travis County Judge by former Travis County Judge Sam Biscoe with Andy's wife Sara and children Hattie, 5 1/2 and Franklin, 4, (hidden behind his dad) looking on

## Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

**Sharon Brown** reports, "**Don's** condition (Parkinson's) has been worsening and we have signed up with Hospice Austin. This means that we will have regular medical visits in our home and try our best for him not to go back to the hospital. He was there for aspiration pneumonia in September and for another problem three weeks ago. I know our dear friends will understand that we've been focused on **Don's** multiple afflictions and have not had time to communicate. We are blessed to have friends and family close by (**Andy** and **Sarah** live next door) to help and shop for groceries. We hope that everyone is safe and healthy." **Don** and **Sharon**, you are both in our prayers.

**Jo Jensen** reports, "Finally, after driving 15 miles over washboard dirt roads at 10 miles an hour exiting Badlands National Park, we breathed a sigh of relief for the paved road ahead with its 60 mph speed limit. Less than 5 miles into a paved road, **Bob** and I laughed out loud when we saw the yellow flag and sign succinctly stating "Rough Road Next 5 Miles." Suddenly, we hit a bump and heard a loud thump. We decided something came dislodged in the cabin of our camper van and continued down the road. Twenty miles later we reached a gorgeous vista where we stopped for a photo op. I climbed out and walked toward the back of the van to take a shot with the van in the foreground. Whoa! The storage container on the back of the van was completely empty! Only the frame and one shelf remained attached. Gone were the leveling blocks, air compressor, rope lights, towels, collapsible grill, tablecloth, and several other small items. Apparently, the doors popped out of their hinges when we hit the "big bump." We decided to drive 20 miles back to the rough road section to see if we could recover anything. It was a like a bizarre scavenger hunt. Sure enough, once we arrived on the 5 miles of rough road, we located the top of the container in the middle of the 2-lane highway. When we noticed the doors on the side of the road, we laughed again. The cheap "made in China" lock holding the doors closed was still tightly closed and doing its job. Ultimately, we found a few items but certainly not all. Nonetheless, we had the container parts and thought it might be repairable. Our trip to Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, Badlands National Park, Mt. Rushmore, Crazy Horse Museum,

Deadwood (where **Wild Bill Hickok** and **Calamity Jane** are buried), and Spearfish Canyon Scenic Drive did not disappoint in their magnificent beauty, oft-neglected history, gorgeous sunrises and sunsets, star-filled night skies, cool temperatures, and the pure joy of open roads (**Jo** prefers back roads to Interstate highways). We made no reservations for overnight stays in the camper and "boondocked" at a couple of charming country wineries, on federal land, and several remarkable small-town city parks...my favorite was Valentine, Nebraska ("the city with Heart"). Our dog, **Winston**, handled the trip like a pro, enjoying numerous overnight stops with running spaces large enough to wear out a one-year old puppy. Many photos taken. So many memories that our hearts are overflowing."



Fall 2020 Bob and their dog Winston enjoyed a stop at the Badlands Grocery



Fall 2020 Jo Jensen and Bob Garrett enjoyed seeing Mt. Rushmore within a few weeks of Betty and Whit Bodman making a visit there, too

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

**Ruth Koenig** reports that she is delighted to be “home for the holidays” with her son **John** and daughter-in-law **Barbara** here in Austin. She started off the visit with a big event, celebrating her 93rd birthday on Nov. 22nd at home with **John** and **Barbara**, their daughter **Brett** and son-in-law **Travis Greig** (incidentally, one of this correspondent’s 6th graders a few years ago) and **Ruth’s** 8-year-old 2nd grade twin granddaughters **Lottie** and **Thea**. **Ruth** says wryly that the twins are using iPads for schoolwork just like hers and probably know more than she does about them. **Brett, Travis**, and the twins also joined in at **John** and **Barbara’s** on Thanksgiving, a much smaller group than had been hoped for. Although a reunion of the 19 disparate **Koenigs** had been planned, they hope to pull it off next year this time. This year the other 12 joined by Zoom after dinner and it was fun but pretty chaotic. **Ruth** notes, “I think it will be back to an occasional Face Time, one family at a time. We haven’t had a reunion for two years and had planned to have one at this time, but of course THAT changed. We didn’t want to have too much time go by as these great-grandchildren grew bigger and older. With the popularity of beards, mustaches and the like I had a hard time identifying grandsons, mixing up parents and kids, and keeping up with conversations.”



11/15/09 Ruth Koenig on her 93rd birthday with her 8-year-old twin great-granddaughters Lottie (l) and Thea (r) Greig at son John and daughter-in-law Barbara’s home here in Austin

Pastor **Tom VandeStadt** and **Robin Chapman** had a short but wonderful visit with their school teacher daughter Alex who came home from the

Dallas area. She arrived on Wednesday and went back on Friday. They had been worried because of COVID-19 that they would not get to see her until later in the year, but it all worked out.

The Women’s Book Club read a most interesting book (THE LIBRARY BOOK by **Susan Orlean**—about the terrible fire at the Los Angeles main library in 1986) in November which lent itself very well to discussion. To get things going, attendees (via Zoom) were asked to come prepared to tell about the role libraries had played in their lives. **Carolyn Thompson** had another meeting that evening that she had to attend, so she wrote the following wonderful biographic note which is being shared here. “Libraries have played a big part in my life. The first job I got when I moved to Austin in 1965 was in the Catalog Dept. of the main UT Library. Later when my daughters were in nursery school and kindergarten I worked half time at the Texas State Library and Archives on the Capitol grounds. At that time they were transitioning from providing interlibrary loans to smaller libraries throughout the state. The breadth of the collection was fascinating with everything from astronomy to zoology! There were cookbooks, texts on plumbing and carpentry, literature and philosophy tomes, old bound journals on house designs and camping. They were in the process of transitioning to serve mainly state agencies. Then I worked in the library of the Texas Medical Association (TMA) for twelve years. I managed the Audiovisual Department where we were in the throes of transitioning from 16mm films to video tapes for both patient and physician continuing education. We never had a fire in the library, but we did have to move most of the older volumes stored in the basement up to the first floor when Shoal Creek threatened to flood the building. When TMA moved to its “new” location on 15th Street we had to weed the collection of many old books and bound journals and calculate the number of linear feet of shelving that would be needed in the new building. Rolling shelves were ordered to fit the collection into a more compact space, and the floor had to be specially reinforced to hold all the weight. While I was in Washington, D.C. in the early 1990’s I had several part-time and temp jobs in various federal agencies and then spent a summer

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

working at a law library just off Dupont Circle. I am grateful for the time I had in Boston and the resources provided by the many campus libraries there. I got to see the Gutenberg Bible in Widener Library on Harvard Yard. I want to read some of the mysteries that are set in that old building with its spooky layers of stacks. When I moved to Arlington, MA, I discovered the Robbins Library just down the street. That was an amusing surprise since Robbins was my maiden name! But I think my favorite is the Boston Public Library with its huge old fashioned reading room and tall windows looking out on Copley Square. Once this pandemic is over I hope to get better acquainted with the new Main Library here in the city of Austin.”

**Andrea Low** celebrated a very special anniversary the day after Thanksgiving—her 60th birthday and her 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with her husband **Paul Toyazaki**. **Paul** and **Andrea** also had an unusual Thanksgiving—they had a pork loin instead of turkey as HEB had run out of the traditional bird. A highlight of the holiday for **Andrea** was a Zoom reunion with three childhood friends who have stayed in touch over the years.

**Beth Gleason** enjoyed a Thanksgiving visit with **Reuel**, **Liz**, and **Becky Nash**. **Beth** drove up from San Antonio where she is working as a chaplain at one of the Baptist Health Systems hospitals. She brought along her dogs **Flower** and **Milagro**. The **Nashes** and **Beth** used to share dog sitting when she lived in Austin so the **Nashes** love those two. **Reuel** and **Liz** call them the "Good for Somethins" after a couple of **Liz's** mom's little dogs (her parents had many many dogs) they used to call the "Good for Nuthins" when their girls were young. **Flower**, **Milagro**, **Leo** (**Becky's** dog), **Luka**, and **Ladybird** (latter two of **Reuel** and **Liz's** very active big girls) were all here as dog attendees on Thanksgiving. They alternated who was in crates to be sure everyone got along, as both little **Milagro** and **Leo** have been attacked by other dogs within the past two weeks. Just trying to take care of everyone, and with a mixed group of dogs that big, they needed to be careful anyway. They were in the backyard doing the right distancing, and all the dogs and humans had a good day. **Reuel** made a great meal for everyone at home. It was actually very mellow, all

things considered. **Reuel** and **Liz** ended up taking plates to **Liz's** nephew **Mark** (who has had some Covid exposure recently at work so he didn't come over) and their California daughter (who grew up with their girls) **Allie Harbert**, who is a nurse working at St David's South who did three 12 hour shift days over the holidays. **Liz** also did a couple of Micah 6 food pickups on Wednesday as part of the extended crew that gets the food to the University Presbyterian pantry. They have to deal with things somewhat differently every Thanksgiving and Christmas to have a full pantry ready the next opening after the holiday. And they were online with **Ellie** and **Annie** and their crews. So it was a very good and rich Thanksgiving for us.

**Betty** and **Whit Bodman** had a very socially distant Thanksgiving as **Betty** is still in White Fish, Montana, and **Whit** is here at home in Austin. **Betty** is still helping their son and daughter-in-law with twin grandsons **Otis** and **Arlo** who were born quite prematurely on July 11 and are now doing well and keeping everyone quite busy. **Otis** still outweighs his brother by more than a pound. **Betty** is now fond of saying that it may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a small metropolitan area to handle twins. Both boys are acting like almost 3 month olds. As of mid-November, Montana is galloping along with increasing Covid infections. The hospitals are at capacity in some places including the closest hospital to them. The local Board of Health refuses to do anything to slow infection rate in spite of pleas from the medical teams. She's pretty much staying put in the house with the boys except for grocery curbside pick up. Their daughter-in-law has several appointments most weeks and their son goes into his (small) office twice a week so there is some exposure potential although relatively limited. **Whit** is holding down the fort in Austin and staying very busy as usual. With the house feeling too empty, he tried replacing **Betty** with a foster dog from Austin Pets Alive who took up residence in **Betty's** usual chair. Luckily **Betty** is still better than the dog at getting up the stairs and is less likely to escape from the backyard by going under the fence so her place in Austin is relatively secure. The dog did escape several times so had to go back to Austin Pets Alive. **Whit** has been busy this term teaching a course on

**Personals (cont)**  
**by Pat Oakes**

Jerusalem on Zoom at the Presbyterian Seminary with Rabbi **Neal Blumofe** of Congregation Agudas Achim. He is also working on a paper for a book and keeping the house in order. Both **Whit** and **Betty** are hoping for a good Covid vaccine (next spring?) so travel back to Austin/up to MT will be easier. Whit is hoping to join **Betty** and the family over the Christmas holidays.



11/2020 Otis Bodman



11/2020 Arlo Bodman



11/2020 The view from the kitchen in White Fish,

**Jen** and **Jim Howicz** have several things to celebrate during this holiday season. The day after Thanksgiving, youngest daughter **Tess**, a senior at Stony Point High School in Round Rock, turned 18. She is enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Program there. She was delighted when 2 friends delivered a fabulous balloon display in honor of the occasion. Eldest daughter **Emily** is graduating from Texas State on December 11 (virtually) with a BS degree majoring in Geography Research, and a minor in French. She and **Katie Lemley** are still roommates with another young woman in San Marcos.



11/27/20 Tess Howicz celebrated her 18th birthday the day after Thanksgiving

**Personals (cont)**  
**by Pat Oakes**

**Mary Sinclair**, writing from Heidelberg, Ontario, Canada, noted that Remembrance Day (what the U.S. calls Veteran's Day) had no ceremony there this year, no parade, no public laying of wreaths, but instead the wreaths were put in place by the Royal Canadian Legion without the usual shivering audience. **Mary** and her husband **Richard Jackson** found the ones dedicated to their parents. **Richard's** father served in the RCAF and the USAF in both world wars and **Mary's** parents were both in the RAF in WWII. **Richard** says that winter has now begun to set in and his leaf raking is over for another year. The pandemic is worsening again there and it appears that **Mary's** tennis club and **Richard's** gym were to be shut down by late November.

**Bill** and **Betty Phillips** and their daughters **Stephanie** and **Katy** are feeling very thankful this holiday season. In mid-November **Bill** had 3 small tumors growing near his bladder removed as a precautionary measure. All is well. He has now been cleared by his knee doctor (the infection in his knee replacement was successfully cleared), the neurologist, and the urologist. He has worked his way through series of health drawbacks in 2020, and they are all breathing a sigh of relief.



12/16/18 A view of the church just before the candlelight carol service

**Personals (cont)**  
**by Pat Oakes**



11/2020 Chaplain Beth Gleason all decked out in PPE as she starts her day at St. Luke's Baptist Hospital in San Antonio

**Beth Gleason** says, "I am working as a chaplaincy resident until Aug 2021 within the Baptist Health System in San Antonio. At present I serve 54 hours a week at St. Luke's Baptist Hospital and this includes a training class 3 mornings a week. This is absolutely the most challenging endeavor I have ever embraced and it has been a tough adjustment these first three months. But despite that I do hope to see more CCA folks now that my schedule has stabilized. As much as I loved being a pastor in rural Colorado for 4 years, I can also say that I absolutely LOVE being a chaplain! Also I hope to see more of my beloved Austin friends over the holidays. Contact **Beth** at her new email: [RevBethG@gmail.com](mailto:RevBethG@gmail.com)<<mailto:RevBethG@gmail.com>> or 512-297-7591" We know you are up to the challenge, **Beth**—and we look forward to seeing you on Zoom if you are up to that—and in person at some point!!

## History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Folks who have been at the church since the mid -1980s know **Marilyn Gaddis** and **George Carruthers** who have visited often from San Marcos where they live. **Marilyn** was a member of the church here in Austin, and then moved to San Marcos to be a faculty member in the School of Education at what was then Southwest Texas State. **Marilyn**, 93, and **George**, 97, who had both been widowed, met through a mutual friend who was involved with a singles group. They dated for 2 years and enjoyed their visits to the church during that time. They married in 1986 and celebrated their 34th anniversary in November.

**George Carruthers** is a very lucky man. He survived being shot down over France in 1943. He is a member of the Caterpillar Club. It's a group of folks who have used a parachute to make an emergency jump from an aircraft. **George** made his jump on July 14, 1943, when he was blown out of a B-17 near Paris, France. His **parachute** saved him twice that day! First, it protected his chest from flak from the Focke-Wulf 190's guns that shot down the bomber. Second, though badly damaged, it slowed his descent and finally opened just before he crashed to the ground, landing on his back. Unfortunately, the German soldiers had seen the bomber crash and were right there to intercept **George** saying, "For you the war is over!" He spent two years as a POW.

After the war **George** served in the Strategic Air Command and had several other assignments. Beginning in Nov., 1966, he flew 100 combat missions in Viet Nam. He returned home in 1967 and retired from active duty in 1972 as a Lt. Colonel and moved to Central Texas. To find out a great deal more about **George's** adventures, click on <https://www.patandmeloakes.com/GeorgeCarruthers.html>

**Mel Oakes** had a wonderful time researching **George's** career. Be sure and check it out and you will learn a great deal about **George** and WWII.



Palm Sunday 1990s George Carruthers, Weldon Scheel, Marilyn Gaddis, and Marie Scheel at church

## History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



2/20/2010 Vic Appel with good friends Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers



11/20/16 Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary at coffee hour after church