

THE VISITOR

February 2019

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



I'm not sure if **Wendell Berry** is a poet who's prophetic, or a prophet who's poetic, a Christian who farms, or a farmer who's Christian. At any rate, through his poems and essays, in the way he lives as a farmer who loves the land, and who's deeply grateful to God, to whom all land belongs, **Wendell Berry** is a prophetic presence in this world.

Wendell Berry ends his essay, "The Gift of Good Land," with these prophetic words, words replete with Christian symbolism:

"To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want."

Wow. Put those words on your refrigerator. Place them on your doorposts, to remind yourself every time you enter and every time you leave your home. Teach them to your children.

To live, we must break the body and shed the blood of creation.

The body and blood of God's creation.

The body and blood that belongs to God.

Body and blood—life. God's life.

Are we breaking the bodies and shedding the blood—the life that belongs to God, God's life—knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently? Are we living sacramentally?

Or are we breaking the bodies and shedding the blood—killing God's life—greedily, clumsily, destructively? Are we desecrating God's creation?

Prophetic words to ponder.

Especially before going to the grocery store, or eating our next meal.

Do I know if the food I'm putting in my shopping cart, and on my plate, is sacramental or a desecration?

Did those who broke it from the earth, or killed it, do so knowing the land, the water, the air, the plants, the animals, the fish, all belong to God, and did they break it, or kill it, in a loving fashion, skillfully, reverently?

Or did the production of the food in my shopping cart, on my plate, desecrate God's creation by poisoning land, water and air, by causing animals to suffer needlessly, by exploiting poorer, more vulnerable human beings?

Tough questions that hit close to home.

In fact, right on the dinner table.

In fact, right into our very own bodies.

Is what we're putting into our very own bodies in order to live sacramental or a desecration?

These are questions I hope we'll ask ourselves when we gather after Easter to reflect on **Jim Antal's** book, *Climate Church, Climate World*. Food production and consumption have a direct impact on climate change.

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Maybe we can start a new group in our church called Sacramental Eating, or Sacramental Living. We can share sacramental earth-respecting recipes, support one another in making practical changes in how we live in order to live more sacramentally, withdraw our support for systems and institutions that desecrate God's creation through greed and destructive actions.

Tom

March Visitor Deadline February 25, 2019

Church Leadership

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

Witnessing Our Southern Border: Immigration Monitoring

Texas Impact and the ACLU are sponsoring a program, Courts and Ports, to monitor the immigration court and border crossing in Brownsville, TX. Groups go down to the Brownsville area Sunday evening, monitor the court and the border crossing for part of the day Monday and Tuesday, visit some immigrant service programs, and return either Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning.

Whit Bodman will be leading groups on February 24th, March 3rd and March 17th, but there are groups going every week beyond Easter. **Whit** would like to put together a group from our church, perhaps with UBC and UCC as well. This is not only an opportunity to witness several aspects of the immigration phenomenon, but also a time to meet with people working full-time at the border, and to think together about what we are witnessing.

More information at: <http://texasimpact.org/project/courts-ports/>

Collecting Supplies to Meet the Needs of the Refugees in South Texas

We are collecting supplies for the Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley and other organizations that are providing assistance to the refugees who have been released in South Texas without any food or money. They have requested the following supplies:

- Toiletries, new and unopened, for men and women (deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs).
- Shoes (sandals, tennis shoes, loafers, etc) for men, women, children and infants of all sizes.
- Clothes (pants, t-shirts, blouses, underclothing, etc) for children and adults of all sizes.
- Baby supplies for toddlers (Pampers, baby wipes, baby bottles, etc.),
- Sealed snack food (granola bars, chips, peanut butter & cheese crackers, etc)
- Gift cards to purchase food items.
- Phone cards.
- Plastic bags for families to pack sandwiches, snacks, and water for their trip.

Lenten Program: What I Believe, Don't, and Why

Whit Bodman will lead a Lenten study from March 10 to April 7 focused on **Marcus Borg's**, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. It will be supplemented by some other short readings to be distributed ahead of time. The topic is "What I Believe, What I Don't, and Why." We will discuss the positives and negatives of various ideas about basic Christian topics such as God, Jesus, Faith, Crucifixion, Sin, and Prayer, ranging from modern progressive and humanistic understandings to the Reformed tradition of our roots. The approach is based on the idea that every perspective has strengths and weaknesses. It is helpful to identify them. This is a discussion, with a short initial presentation to start us off. We will meet after worship from March 10th to April 7. Please see **Whit Bodman** if you'd like more details. There are several copies of **Borg's** book available at church if you'd like to borrow a copy.

After Easter Book Discussion: *Climate Church, Climate World*

After Easter, we will gather folks together to read and discuss the book, *Climate Church, Climate World, How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, by **Jim Antal**, Forward by **Bill McKibben**. **Jim Antal** is the United Church of Christ's premiere advocate for addressing climate change, and he was instrumental in the UCC's historic decision to divest from the fossil fuel industry. Some of us from CCA-UCC met him when he addressed the South Central Conference and led workshops at our Annual Meeting several years ago. His book addresses the urgent need to respond to climate change, and ways churches can respond. So, start reading, and await further details for discussing, and hopefully, acting. Several copies of **Antal's** book are available at church if you'd like to borrow a copy.

Heart of Texas Association News February

by Liz Nash

Our Heart of Texas Association Spring Meeting is going to bring an opportunity to spend time on the beach for those who come and stay overnight, along with a new way to meet for those who cannot physically be present. Our host, who has extended a gracious and enthusiastic invitation, will be **St. Paul UCC**, 5525 Lipes Blvd., in **Corpus Christi** on **Saturday, May 4th, at 11 am**. As usual, our meeting will include lunch. We hope many of you will plan to come to be with our very welcoming brothers and sisters in Christ at St. Paul, and will also plan to spend some time enjoying Corpus Christi.

This particular spring meeting will be a first for us in that we are planning to have a way to attend by video conference, recognizing that the distance will keep some from coming. Our Association Constitution and By Laws were composed very intentionally as we formed to allow for this kind of attendance, knowing that we would be dealing with significant distances for our meetings. We anticipate having an Ecclesiastical Council at our Spring Meeting. It will be important as we review our candidate for ministry to ensure that we have a quorum for our vote on approval for ordination, where a quorum is attendance from majority of our churches. We anticipate setting up a video conference on an online, easy to use platform like Zoom, as well as having a way for those who will be attending online to have a “test run” login sometime before the meeting. (I know from experience that we need to get our online attendees to try it beforehand to ensure that sound and video work for everyone.) As we get this set up, we will be sending out more information about the what, where, when, and how to do a trial login and how to join the meeting on May 4th.

St Paul UCC in Corpus Christi, our host church, is eagerly awaiting the arrival of their new settled (permanent) minister after the past interim year. **Rev. Dana Worsham** will be arriving in early February, leading worship beginning on February 10th. **Dana** comes to St. Paul from the Atlanta, Georgia area, where she attended seminary and served a church. She is an ordained Disciples of Christ minister with a background of military service. We look forward to welcoming **Dana** to the UCC and to the Heart of Texas Association.

Many thanks to **Carl Schwartz-King** for leading our boundary training for ministers at Bethany Congregational Church in San Antonio on Saturday, January 12th. **Carl** is the Licensed Minister of Congregational Care at United Christian in Austin. He has been trained by the Faith Trust Institute to lead boundary training in the South Central Conference, and gives his time in this ministry. Boundary training, for those who are unfamiliar with the term, helps ministers understand and reflect together on the maintaining of appropriate boundaries in the areas of handling money, friendships in the church, sexual relationships, ministry to people in churches the minister no longer serves, and other areas of ministry that require maintaining appropriate boundaries. The Heart of Texas Association requires our ministers (except those completely retired from serving churches or other ministries) to complete this training every five years. We do this as a commitment to our members and ministers, seeking to provide ministry that honors our faith as Christians, and we invite all to support our pastors in this commitment.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Micah 6 Sunday Suppers for Homeless Young Adults

You may have heard about the Micah 6 Sunday suppers that Congregational Church of Austin provides quarterly throughout the year for young people living on the streets of Austin. But maybe you don't know the details of this program. Here's some history.

CCA is one of nine churches that participated in the formation of the Micah 6 Coalition in 2002, whose mission is to work together to meet the needs of homeless and impoverished people in the City of Austin. Through facilities in the University of Texas area, the coalition works to answer the call of Micah 6:8—to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Micah 6 of Austin a non-profit, tax-exempt organization of 11 member congregations:

All Saints Episcopal Church, Congregational Church of Austin, First English Lutheran Church, Highland Park Baptist Church, Hyde Park Presbyterian Church, St. Austin Catholic Parish, University Avenue Church of Christ, University Baptist Church, University Christian Church, University Presbyterian Church, and University United Methodist Church.

In January 2012, the member churches of Micah 6 recognized the growing needs of homeless youths in Austin. The Street Youth Program was formed and provides a Drop-In Center for these young people, aged 30 and under. The Center is located in the lower floor of the University Baptist Church administration building and is open Sunday afternoons from 2 to 6 pm. The Center occupies two large rooms; the Atrium room and the Dining room which includes the Computer Corner. The Drop-in Center provides a place where youth can gather out of the weather, use computers with internet access, visit with each other, play games or engage in arts and crafts, relax and lounge, and use the rest rooms. The Director of the Youth Drop-In Center is **Mac McKaskle**.

Micah 6 Street Youth Outreach Drop-In Center at
University Baptist Church



The computer corner stays busy.



The Atrium

Additional Street Youth Programs provided by Micah 6 include:

- The Women's Resource Group*, which offers a safe respite for homeless women 30 and under,
- Mentoring, information on community resources, Guidance for pregnancy-related issues at the University United Methodist Church on Tuesdays 11:00am – 1:00pm, and
- Guidance in finding permanent housing through partnership with *One Life at a Time*, a project of University Christian Church.

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Micah 6 Sunday Suppers

A foundational component of the Street Youth Ministry is to provide not only a safe place for youth to gather but also to provide a hot, home-cooked meal. For many of these street youth, the Sunday supper is the most nourishing food they'll have all week.

Volunteer teams from member congregations prepare the entrée, salad, bread, vegetables, and dessert ahead of time and bring the food to the Drop-In Center by 4 pm. Plating and serving of food begins at 4:30. The meal is finished at 5:30 and clean-up usually is finished around 6 pm. Meal providers plan on serving large portions, and most youth come back for seconds (or thirds!).

CCA has been providing quarterly Micah 6 suppers at the UBC Drop-In Center since the suppers began in 2012, when **Liz Nash** and **Dennis Murphy** coordinated this effort. CCA has two teams that alternate providing meals at the Drop-Ins. Since CCA does this quarterly, each team provides cooks and servers only once every six months, so being involved doesn't require much time.

Group 1 includes:

Fran and Rambie Briggs
Rev Jo Jensen & Bob Garrett
Faye and Andy Dierksen
John Goff & Gail Christeson
Barbara Burnham
Nodie and Dennis Murphy
Joy Penticuff

Group 2 includes:

Whit and Betty Bodman
Lynne Lemley
Abby Lundberg
Pam Tucker
Rene Slataper
Tom VandeStadt
Caroline Thompson
Jaime Hadley

Recently, **Dennis** passed the meal coordination role to **Joy Penticuff**, although **Dennis** remains a "core" volunteer who typically cooks and serves each time CCA provides the meal. Other "core" volunteers are **Rene Slataper** and our **Pastor Tom**, whose specialty is washing dishes, often assisted by his wife **Robin**.

Here's a description of the most recent CCA Drop-In dinner, on Sunday January 13th. The menu was Queen Ranch Chicken (aka King Ranch Chicken but cooked by **Joy** so renamed), green salad and rolls provided by **Pam Tucker**, refried beans and rice cooked by **Jaime Hadley**, and home-made cookies baked by **Carolyn Thompson** and **Dennis Murphy**. **Tom, Rene, Dennis** and **Joy** served the meal and cleaned up.

Becoming a CCA Micah 6 team member providing a Sunday meal for street youth is a rewarding experience, and it requires your involvement only once every six months.

For those of you who aren't currently on either team but would like to be involved—no worries—CCA is scheduled to provide the meal and clean-up on March 10th and May 12th, so please let **Dennis** or **Joy** know if you'd like to be a part of the CCA Micah 6 Street Youth quarterly meal.

Personals by Pat Oakes

Reuel Nash got everyone's attention during prayer time on Sunday, Dec. 30. He was sitting in a back pew with wife **Liz**, daughter and son-in-law **Ellie** and **Louis Rodgers**, and **Louis's** parents, **Louise Gauthier** and **Guy Rodgers**. **Reuel** said his joy was, "Four of the people sitting in this pew are really looking forward to becoming grandparents in May!" Heads immediately turned and smiles of delight appeared on the faces of the congregation. The family was all together for the holidays with the culmination being the announcement of the gender of the baby on New Year's Day. Even **Ellie** and **Louis** did not know as they had asked the folks who did the sonogram a month earlier to seal the envelope with the results. The **Nashes** had almost two dozen friends and family for lunch on New Year's Day (tacos and tamales and more). At the end of lunch, **Hannah Rush**, daughter **Becky's** roommate, was given the envelope with the relevant info and went into a bedroom to put either banana Laffy Taffy (for a boy) or Life Savers (for a girl) into the whale piñata. Everyone crowded around outside while **Ellie** and **Louis** took a few brisk swings to break the piñata and reveal that they're having a girl! They've been referring to the little one as "Belugi" since they heard a kid with a British accent playing with a stuffed whale toy and being otherwise ignored by his parents saying in a thick accent, "That's why they call it Belugi." Hence the whale piñata! Here's to baby girl Belugi!



1/1/19 Louis and Ellie Nash Rodgers all set to wallop the whale piñata Belugi to find out the gender of their baby



12/30/18 Four expectant grandparents with the expecting parents!! Reuel and Liz Nash, Louis and Ellie Rodgers, and Louise Gauthier and Guy Rodgers

For the past year, **Barbara Burnham** has been working with Project Linus to make blankets for children in crisis. Since last February she has made about 75 blankets. For one baby blanket, she taught herself how to crochet an edging, thanks to YouTube videos! She continues to shop the sales to buy more fleece and to turn them out as fast as she can. The need is great. On January 19, for the first time, she attended a work day in which the blankets were processed and bagged for distribution. It was an amazing beehive of activity! Some people brought sewing machines to sew on labels, others inspected incoming blankets for suitability, others sorted and sized them, and at the tail end of the process were those who bagged them up and included a Project Linus poem.

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

This time they had a couple of Westlake High School lads who were there with their moms, through the Westlake High Young Men's Service League. In addition to helping, their organization has had a drive to gather new scissors and other supplies, as well as fleece for the use of the members. **Barbara** worked at the table where problem blankets, mostly made by children, were given some TLC. She met some wonderful artists who had produced beautiful quilts and afghans, as well as more complicated fleece blankets than she usually makes. It's an inspiring group of dedicated folks, and it was exciting to be a part of it (despite sore hands when she left!).

Longtime member (since the 1950s), the amazing **Nancy Brown** will be 99 on February 16th. She loves company and cards so it would be wonderful to drop by for a visit (call first) or send her a card. Her address has changed slightly because of remodeling going on in her wing of the skilled nursing center. Cards should be sent to **Ms Nancy Brown**, Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Room 312, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Drive, Austin, TX 78753.

Megan Goff has had a steep learning curve on how to survive severe cold weather. She had a great time in Austin for the holidays and headed back to the Art Institute of Chicago in mid-January. There was a good bit of snow when she first got back—and it was cold, of course. But then, at the end of January, unbelievably frigid weather swept across the area complete with wind chill factors of 40 below zero. Stay warm, **Megan**—or better yet, just stay inside as much as possible.

Longtime members and friends of the church will remember **David Cleaver-Bartholomew** who was our church intern in the mid-1980s under the supervision of former pastor **John Towery**. **David** and his wife **Dena** live in Manlius, NY. **David** and **Dena** came with their two daughters to the 100th anniversary celebration of the church in 2001. **David** continues working for the Lutherans as pastor at Zion Lutheran Church outside Utica. He also is teaching an Introduction to the Old Testament class online for the NY School of Ministry, the UCC regional training program for people preparing for ordained ministry. He will also resume doing tax preparation for Empower Tax Services. **David** likes doing all three, but

it really keeps him busy. **Dena** is an Episcopal priest, her church is doing well, and she is also working for her diocese and is working and studying congregational development. Their eldest daughter **Audrey** has finished her first semester at the Boston College Law School and has just accepted an internship for the summer with the Federal District Court in Syracuse. She and her fiancé **Matt** met at Emory 6 year ago and plan to be married in January of 2020. Youngest daughter **Lydia** graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in May and has been working with an organization in Columbus, OH, called CRIS (Community Refugee and Immigration Service) through the Episcopal Service Corp. She works with refugee families; getting them settled in apartments, finding them jobs, and generally helping them get acclimated and resettled in the U. S. Her internship lasts through June, 2019, so she'll soon start looking for another position to begin this summer. She's thinking she eventually wants to go on to grad school, but first wants to have another work experience under her belt and figure out more clearly what type of grad program and where to go. She majored in Economics, International Government and Politics, and Spanish. She's thinking about something that will combine her interests in economics and government policy. **David** remembers fondly his time at our church and sends his good wishes to those who remember him.



12/25/18 96-year-old Cathy Hubbs with her daughter Laura Hubbs-Tait on Christmas Day

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

On December 29th, **Allison Carruthers**, granddaughter of **George Carruthers** and **Marilyn Gaddis**, was married to **Marcos Luna Hoya** from Denia, Spain. The Austin ceremony was a beautiful blend of two cultures. The service and the vows were in English and Spanish. **Marcos'** parents and his sister and family came from Spain for the ceremony. The bride and the groom are graduate students at Baylor and are continuing their studies.



12/29/18 Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers at their granddaughter's wedding



1/20/19. It was a challenge to get to church on time with a huge crane blocking San Antonio Street. There is amazing growth in the area as old landmarks disappear and new high rises appear.



12/30/18 Eli Soneto, and Colin Ferguson (our former cellist and good friend) were in church catching up with folks including Nodie Murphy and Tony Rogers, our current cellist



12/31/18 Pat and Mel Oakes had a lovely New Year's Eve afternoon visit with 102 1/2 year old Florence Castle--her caregiver Mary Jo Ingram took the picture