

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



Towards the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells a few fishermen to follow him. I think he does so, in part, because he needs their help. Jesus can't do by himself what he believes God is calling him to do. He needs other people's help.

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus has had his big change of heart, his baptism of repentance. He's just back from spending over a month in the wilderness, by himself, facing temptation. He's now convinced the kingdom of God is near, and that God is sending him into Galilee to help as many people as possible change their hearts and awaken to the reality of God's kingdom.

But there's so little time, hardly any at all, because God's kingdom is *so* close, and things on earth are getting *so* bad. Jesus knows he can't bring about this widespread change of heart quickly enough by himself. He needs others to help him, immediately. So he calls a few others to join him. Jesus will help them change their hearts. In turn, they'll help others change their hearts. Then those others will help still more change their hearts. And on and on it will go.

It's a pyramid scheme. Jesus starts running a pyramid scheme in which more and more people bring more and more people into this mass movement of changed hearts and spiritual awakening. This mass movement of transformation and awakening begins with Jesus and a few fisherman. Instead of hauling fish into your boat, Jesus beseeches them, help me haul people into this movement of transformation and awakening.

The call to follow Jesus has a different feel to it when we hear it as a call for help. Come, follow me, Jesus says, I need your help. I can't do by myself what God is calling me to do, so I'm extending God's call to you as well. God's now calling *us*. Come, help me.

I don't think we typically think of Jesus as a guy who needs help. He wields tremendous power. He casts out demons, cures leprosy, brings dead people back to life. With abilities like that, what kind of help could Jesus need?

Apparently, he needs help changing people's hearts. Jesus makes blind people see and deaf people hear, but he never puts his hand on a person's chest and says, heart, be changed! People have to change their own hearts. People have to undergo their own interior transformation, just as Jesus did.

That's not to say Jesus doesn't play a role. Jesus helps people change their hearts. He teaches and encourages them, he demonstrate to them how a person with a changed heart relates to God and other people. But this is time-consuming work, and there are so many people. Time is getting short, and wars and rumors of war are spreading. Jesus needs help, and he needs it now.

I think this story is as true today as it was when Mark wrote it. I think Jesus needs our help today. Follow me, he's saying, help me bring about a widespread change of heart and spiritual awakening as quickly as possible. Who can deny that's what we need in our world right now, in our country—a widespread change of heart and spiritual awakening, as quickly as possible. Yes, there's a host of political, economic, social, and cultural ills that need our immediate attention so they don't get worse and so we avoid calamity. We can't just

wait for a widespread change of heart and awakening to occur, we need to act on some things *now*. Nevertheless, on a deeper human level, I think Jesus *is* calling us to change our hearts and to awaken to the reality of God's Way, and to help him create a movement of transformation and awakening. Let's respond like the fishermen did.

TOM

March Visitor Deadline February 24, 2021

Church Leadership

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

Heart of Texas Association News
February
by Liz Nash

The Heart of Texas Association Committee on Ministry licensed **Rene Slataper** during its January 19th meeting. **Rene** is currently serving as Minister of Outreach and Organizational Development at Labyrinth Progressive Student Ministries in Austin, an ecumenical college student ministry based near the University of Texas. The ministry is supported by several Austin area churches. **Rene** is also a student in the online Master of Divinity program at Chicago Theological Seminary and is a Member in Discernment with the Heart of Texas Association. He is a member of the Congregational Church of Austin, where he also currently works part-time as their video technician. **Rene** is also a recipient of multiple scholarships from the national UCC. We receive Pastor **Rene** with joy as begins licensed ministry in the Heart of Texas Association.

It is with sadness that I share that the Evangelical Church of Lyons has voted to leave the United Church of Christ and give up its membership as a church in the Heart of Texas Association. The Lyons church has been part of the former Brazos Association and then later part of Heart of Texas since the South Central Conference became part of the United Church of Christ. Our ties have been long and heartfelt, with good memories over the years of meeting with them, sharing their joy as the church fellowship hall and sanctuary were rebuilt, and having their members be active and great supporters of the Association and at Slumber Falls Camp. They have recently called **Andrew Keuer** as their pastor and have decided to head in a different direction in their ministry. They leave us with our appreciation for their many years with us, and with every hope and prayer that their ministry will flourish in faithfulness and joy in the years to come.

Tom VandeStadt has announced his retirement as pastor of the Congregational Church of Austin as of the end of February 2021. **Tom** has served Congregational Church for nearly 20 years and has led the church in many ways -- in homeless outreach, in excellent worship, through his active social justice work in **Austin**, and in caring ministry. We wish **Tom** well as he prepares for this transition in his life, and offer prayers for Congregational (the church

where I am a member) as it joins several other churches in the Heart of Texas in a time of transition and search for new leadership in Christ's ministry.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals
by Pat Oakes

Lynn Chavarria reports, "The first Congregational Church of Austin responsibility for Micah 6 Sunday dinner was January 10th. The year started in a flurry. That is -- the snow kind. **John Goff** was to prepare half the meat main course and called early that day to say he had no electricity and could not navigate the streets near where he lives because of the snow. **Pam Tucker** had committed to preparing the other half of the main course. She was able to step in immediately and prepare twice as much -- good reserve planning on her part. Other team members who contributed are **Tom VandeStadt, Joy Penticuff, Jo Jensen**, and myself. We will certainly miss **Tom** on the Micah 6 team when he leaves, but know he will be 'nourishing' many more people in his new endeavors. It is so inspiring to see **Mac McCaskle** and **Craig Bell** be there physically Sunday after Sunday for the Street Youth at the University Baptist Church. Typically 20 plus youth are present for the dinner, but the attendance has been down over the last several months. **Mac** reports 'first plate' servings that start the meal -- all attendees are told to eat as much as they want. There must be some German grandmother legacy here -- never let anyone go away hungry. We have lost several Micah 6 team members from last year, so please volunteer. We are assigned only 6 Sundays per year, with two teams, so the individual commitment is only 3 Sundays." **Pam Tucker** continues, "I had purchased a large spiral ham intending to prepare half for Micah 6 and keep half for family, but found out that **John Goff** who was planning to prepare turkey had no electricity. Despite my worries that some people might not eat ham, I prepared the whole ham and took it to UBC. When I dropped it off, I told them I hoped it would be enough. They assured me it would be. **Lynn Chavarria** did an excellent job organizing the meal and food preparers and it was her first time to organize this group." In addition to the aforementioned items, **Lynn** brought rice with peas and carrots, **Tom** brought fruit salad, **Jo Jensen** brought rolls, and **Joy** brought dessert. Thanks to all who volunteered.

It is with great sorrow that I report that long-time member of the church, **Nancy Brown**, died early in the morning of January 25th. She would have

celebrated her 101st birthday on February 16th. The quarantine had been very hard on her as her special caregivers were no longer allowed into the nursing home facility where she lived. Without their love and extra care she started fading away. **Nancy** taught school at Oak Springs Elementary School for 22 years, was a long-time member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority through Huston-Tillotson, and was a thoughtful, loving, kind, generous and always impeccably-dressed presence in the life of the church until she could no longer come. **Don** and **Sharon Brown** brought her to church for a number of years after **Nancy** no longer wanted to deal with Austin traffic. **Nancy** nominated me to serve with her and others on the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) advisory board for AISD in the 1970s, a federal program to help with school desegregation. Those monthly meetings made a lasting impression on me. Her dear friend **Catherine Lee** and neighbor **Mary Caldwell** helped **Nancy** to stay connected through these past few years. For more information on **Nancy** and her husband **James Wiley Brown**, go to this link from the church history site.

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/JamesandNancyBrown.html>



April, 1981 Mel and Mardie with Nancy Brown at the Carver Branch Library at an art exhibit sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



5/1/06 Nancy Brown, Cora Gordon (aunt of Joe McMillan) Tom VandeStadt, Suzanne Vanderpoel, Joe McMillan



2/16/15 Nancy Brown's 95th birthday celebration at Green Pastures—Nancy Brown with Sharon and Don Brown, and Pat and Mel Oakes



4/1/12 Nancy Brown, Mathis Blackstock, and Lynne Lemley at coffee hour



6/19/16 Catherine Lee and her husband Bob brought Nancy Brown to church for a special visit

Bill Beardall, executive director of the Equal Justice Center (EJC), has certainly had an interesting (!) time during the pandemic. He and the staff started working remotely last March and then got word that the building where they had had offices for 19 years on Congress Ave., just south of Lady Bird Lake, had been sold to a developer and that they would have to move out by August 1st. To say that this was a difficult task is an understatement. They launched a search for new office space and found a good location near old Highland Mall (now an Austin Community College campus). Their new address is 314 East Highland Mall Blvd, Suite 401, Austin, TX 78752. They hired a team of movers to get their stuff (belonging to the 12 employees and 6 law interns/undergrads) to 2 storage suites in the new building. The whole staff was involved, too—all concerned about becoming part of a super-spreader event, but they were very careful and no-one became ill. Between August when they moved and January 15, there were very few visits to their new digs, but they did have a space set up for mail, printers and scanners and a deposition room for cases. They were able to spend less money on rent as they were not in their full space until mid-January. Because the pandemic is still with us, **Bill** thinks they may not be going to work in their new space for 5-6 more months. **Bill** does marvel that they have sustained their operation through remote electronic means, including their offices in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. **Bill** has realized that the

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

changes in law office work patterns during the pandemic will have some carryover, a change that will broaden the scope of representation of clients—especially those in underserved areas. In addition to the obvious challenges, their office manager decided to change jobs, so **Bill** and 2 others are taking on those tasks until a new office manager is hired. The EJC has been very involved in working with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and “Dreamers.” On Day 1 of the new administration, 2 important reforms were introduced having to do with immigration—one reaffirmed the nation’s commitment for the DACA program and withdrew the **Trump** administration’s efforts to abolish DACA. DACA is still imperiled by Texas Attorney General General **Paxton** who is seeking a court order to end DACA. The second measure was to propose a comprehensive immigration reform bill, including a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have lived, worked, and paid taxes for many years. **Bill** is relieved that with of lots of folks working on the move on the 15th of January, no signs of COVID-19 have appeared.

Our church family suffered another sad loss with the death from COVID-19 of **Chencho Flores** on Jan. 10 at the age of 91. He and **Beth Placek** married on May 1, 2016. We all enjoyed getting to know charming **Chencho** and were delighted when he played his accordion in several church talent shows and the Joyful Noise Orchestra at Christmas. Of course we had not seen him during the pandemic, but prior to that time he was playing/singing/emceeing at several venues in Austin-- at the White Horse (where he and **Beth** married) and the Tropicana where a number of us went to hear him play. Read more about **Chencho** here—<https://www.austin360.com/story/entertainment/music/2021/01/14/chencho-flores-renowned-austin-conjunto-musician-dies-covid-19/4159208001/> and listen to some music featuring **Chencho** and his accordion at <http://frontera.library.ucla.edu/artists/conjunto-cielito-lindo>. Our hearts go out to **Beth** as she grieves his loss. **Beth** is so grateful and thankful for all the notes, calls, and cards of condolence she has received from folks at the church.



4/21/19 Beth Placek and Chencho Flores were delighted to be at church on Easter Sunday

Lynne and **George Lemley** eagerly await the arrival of their first grandchild who is due to make her debut March 18th. New father-to-be **Jeffrey Lemley** works at **Mark Hart Architecture**, while Canadian daughter-in-law, **Rachelle Rioux Lemley**, in blooming good health, continues to do some massage therapy and art projects. **Rachelle** recently sold a large painting of hers to first-time novelist **James Stoia**, who used this painting as the cover for his recently published novel **This Side of Babylon** (look it up on Amazon). Of course, the ongoing Covid virus will make it impossible for any of **Rachelle's** family or her parents, **Claud Rioux** and **Brenda MacLellan**, both of Halifax, Nova Scotia, to be present for the birth their first grandchild, too! Although feeling slightly bereft, **Rachelle** is thrilled and patiently allowed her mother and father-in-law to lay hands on her tummy to feel their new granddaughter squirming around to lay hands on her tummy to feel their new granddaughter squirming around. **Jeffrey** and **Rachelle** have just registered on Amazon at [Jeffrey & Rachelle's Baby Registry](#). Many of us have known **Jeffrey** since he was a little boy and now he is soon to be a father. If you have independent ideas on gifts for the new baby, you can send gifts or cards to The **Lemley's**, 2900 South 1st, Apt. 532, just a couple of miles up South 1st from where **Lynne** and **George** were living when Jeff was born!

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



1/24/10 Jeffrey and Rachelle are looking forward to the arrival of their daughter in mid-March

CJ Wood had a wonderful adventure in January. She recounts, "My initial plan for the weekend of January 7, 2021 was to attend the Q Christian Fellowship Conference in Fort Lauderdale, FL. As a part of that trip, I was going to visit my best friends **Dale** and **Miranda Peacock** and godchildren **Maddie** (16), **Ethan** (14), **Caedmon** (13), **Asher** (10), and **Keegan** (10), as well as my friends **Ryan** and **Tiffany Gaffney** and their brand new baby girl, **Lydia**. Of course, the pandemic changed my plans until my friend **Ryan** got called to a church in Buda, TX. With a 6 month old baby and dog in tow, **Ryan** and **Tiffany** felt best that they ride in the same vehicle. (This would turn out to be a wise decision since their car broke down three-fourths of the way to Texas.) **Ryan** and **Tiffany** put out a call on Facebook for a volunteer to drive their other van. How could I not jump at the opportunity to see all my friends and get time away from work?!? **Ryan** and **Tiffany** flew me out to Orlando. After **Ryan** picked me up from

the airport, we ate lunch and ran some errands. Then the **Peacocks** met us at a park and we sat in a socially distanced circle with masks, which probably looked like a religious cult meeting to onlookers. We visited for about an hour or two before I headed out. My first pit stop was Ocala, FL, which isn't but a few hours north of Orlando. I wasn't feeling too well, likely to getting the second COVID vaccine 24hrs before. I went to bed early and slept in late. With my women's book club book, **Pope Joan**, on audio playing, I headed out to my next stop in Gulfport, MS. Mississippi has a special place in my heart. I grew up spending most of my summers there. When my maternal grandfather was in the Air Force, he was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi before he was transferred to England. When they made the shift to England, my two aunts stayed behind as they were now young adults and my mom and uncle, who were younger and still in school, went to England. My aunts never moved, so during childhood we made many visits to Biloxi. My older cousin, **Michele**, now lives in Gulfport with her husband, **Mike** (former minor league Cubs outfielder), and son, **Mason**, and daughter, **Maya**. It was a great opportunity to stop and see them. It was so hard not to be able to hug them! After a few hours with them, I made my way to my dad's house in Tomball. After having breakfast with my dad and my uncle Sunday morning, I took off earlier than expected trying to reach **Austin** before the snow. I made it all the way to Giddings before I started seeing evidence of white powder on the ground and then snow started falling from the sky. When I left for Orlando, I never thought I'd be welcomed by snow when I arrived back home. I did my research and found the safest hotels along the way. I also found an airline with high standards for safety while flying. Overall, I was impressed with the lengths the hotels and airlines went to create environments as safe as possible. For the most part, people were compliant. It got a bit scary between the Florida panhandle and East Texas with people not wearing masks. I was able to be cautious and choose my gas stations wisely. This was the first opportunity I've had to get away since the pandemic started. The time was refreshing to my soul as I chased the sun along I-10, listened to my audiobook, sang along with the radio, and spent a lot of time in prayer. It was the

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

first time I have been able to truly disconnect and not think about COVID and death since March 2020. I was rejuvenated, as was evident in people's comments when I returned to work. People commented that I looked alive again. Also, in the end I did get to virtually attend the Q Christian Fellowship Conference after all. That'll be reported on in the next Visitor."

Ann Locasio found a great way to manage stress in January. She says, "One fun event I did was attend a Zoom dance party. Yes, it's possible to virtually dance with others over Zoom. As I've now been vaccinated, I was also able to have a cup of coffee with a friend last Saturday. We processed the stressful recent events together. Connecting with friends and having conversations has always been a great way for me to process difficult events." That is excellent advice, **Ann!**

Laura Hubbs-Tait is hoping that Westminster Senior Living will soon be allowing vaccinated family members to visit vaccinated family who are residents there. Her mom, **Catherine (Cathy) Hubbs**, has really been missing seeing family in these past months. **Laura** (in Oklahoma) and **Cathy** talk almost every evening, but it was particularly hard on **Cathy** when she was quarantined for 2 weeks just before Christmas because of exposure to COVID-19. Fortunately she did not get sick. **Cathy** had her 2nd shot of vaccine on the 20th of January and **Laura** is set to have her second shot by mid-February. We hope you will be able to visit in person soon.

Whit Bodman wrote this for his nephew describing his trip up to Whitefish, MT, before Christmas. "In the beginning was the light, and the light shone forth from the dashboard, and the light multiplied into great and glorious proclamations without end from the mouth of the Great V(olvo). And the Great V said, "Let the ABS cease, for it shuddereth too much upon braking." And it was so. And this was accomplished on the first day. Then the Great V spake again, saying, "Let the traction control system cease, for it is right and orderly for the tires to rotate in unison, even on ice, for ice is beloved of the Great V, especially in Bourbon." And again the Great V spake, "Let the cruise control cease, for it is not right that one rest the legs at great speeds. For I have granted cramps unto humanity that they may drink

water and pee profusely, especially those of aged and shrunken bladders." And the Great V spake yet a third time saying, "Let the transmission warning light shine forth, for it is meet and right that all may, from time to time, contemplate the peace and quiet of resting by the roadside in the wilderness of Wyoming in which they may be required to sojourn with the hood raised." And it was so. And all this was accomplished on the second day. And the Great V delighted in the revelation of lights and acronyms of great mystery from time to time, and dings and bongs without explanation, that the people may wonder and be in awe of all that the Great V has created." Whit continued, "As if that were not exciting enough, coming back I hit a deer in the middle of nowhere in Wyoming. Amazingly, the car was still drivable after the event. I made it perhaps 50 miles before the coolant light came on. Luckily in Wheatland, Wyoming, there was a small garage. I limped in and they were able to fix the problem and strap the hood down so that I could go on. It was an amazing afternoon. When I told them that I taught, they immediately identified me as a liberal. None of them were, but we had a great conversation as they put together my car. It was remarkable. I stopped at Volvo dealer in Fort Collins. They checked the car out and said that, if the bent radiator held out, I might make it to Austin, but I should avoid stop and go traffic because the fan wasn't working. The car is now at the body shop and I am home, and I think I will have another beer. I know you like pictures so...



1/18/21 Whit's Volvo post-deer

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



1/20/21 Whit's Volvo ready to head back to Texas after a scary encounter with a deer



1/22/21 Erin Bodman reading a story to Arlo

Betty Bodman is still in Whitefish, MT, helping son **Noah** and daughter-in-law with twins **Otis** and **Arlo**—now 6 months old but really only 4 1/2 months old as they were born more than 6 weeks early. **Betty** reports that **Otis** now weighs 16 pounds and **Arlo** is up to 15 pounds. She is greatly relieved that **Whit** is home safely and enthusiastically cleaning house and going through mail. **Betty** is managing to get out to cross country ski in the woods and is trying to find a way to get vaccinated up in Montana so another car trip from Austin to Whitefish MT isn't necessary.



1/22/21 Otis Bodman enjoying jumping in his Jumper Roo



1/18/21 Betty Bodman, cross-country skier--who knew!!!

One wonderful advantage of using YouTube and Zoom—it enables folks who live far away to join us on Sunday mornings for church, joys and concerns, and coffee hour. We have regular visits from folks in Germany, Canada, Connecticut, and other far-flung places. **Lisa Kirch** (who lives in Sheffield, AL, and is a professor of art history at the University of Northern Alabama in Florence) says, "Visiting with everyone after church has let me see old friends

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

and keep up a little bit. But it also means I have no news. Christmas was quiet and by myself, although **Sarah** (her daughter who lives in Chicago) and I unwrapped presents on the phone together. Weirdly, I can say that was lovely. The rest of the year was such an ongoing disaster that we can be grateful for small things, perhaps. My biggest news is finishing and submitting an article and then the publication of my silly blog guest post. Breaks from teaching are always 'Okay, time to write!' ” If you like art and/or cats—or like new and intriguing things, take a few minutes to read what Lisa has written—and look for her wonderfully interesting women artists posts on Facebook. <https://artherstory.net/the-calendar-and-the-cat-lady/> Just ask to become a friend on Facebook with **Lisa Kirch**.

Faye and **Andy Dierksen** had so much to celebrate on January 20! Not only did they get to watch our new Vice President and President be sworn into office, but they also celebrated their son **Deek's** transversary! One year ago on Jan. 20, 2020, through the benefits of modern medicine, **Deek**, as just an embryo, was transferred into Faye so she could become his mama! January 20 will always be an extra special day for this wonderful family.



1/20/21 Deek Dierksen on his first transversary

Carol Scott and her husband **Fred** were part of our congregation, for several years, joining in 2009. They moved to **Kansas** several years ago to be closer to family. **Carol** writes to say that they have had a really rough time since late October when **Fred** went by ambulance to a hospital due to an infected foot. The hospital they preferred (where most of his doctors were on staff) was full. He landed elsewhere and spent eight days in that hospital. **Fred** and **Carol** feel certain that is where Covid found him. He was home briefly, went back with more foot trouble where he was then diagnosed with Covid. He was then bounced to still another hospital and a dreadful nursing home. Following the days Fred had spent at home, **Carol**, too, tested positive, but has recovered except for the fatigue and some aches. **Carol** and **Fred** had purchased a new independent living apartment and were planning to move in December. **Carol** contacted staff at the retirement community, they were shocked and arranged for **Fred's** admission right away to their skilled and locked down nursing unit where he improved and really liked his caregivers. Another setback was when he began to need some oxygen. He was then transferred to the excellent hospital which had been their first preference in late October. Essentially, the dreaded virus had done considerable damage to his lungs. Now the hospital has sent him back to the skilled nursing center at their new retirement community. **Carol** moved into their apartment New Year's Eve day. She is so grateful for the help of her brother, sister-in-law and their oldest child and spouse who helped immensely with this move. **Fred** is slowly improving and much happier with the care. But no one, i.e., (hospital doctors or staff there) can say for certain that he will progress to the point where he can live in the apartment with **Carol** (their hope!). **Carol** says a special hello to **Pam Tucker, Tom V., Bill Beardall.** and **Pat and Mel Oakes**. Their new address is 5500 West 123rd Street, Apt. 1016, Leawood, KS 66209. Keep them in your prayers and send them a card or an e-mail (clscott@kc.rr.com).

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



11/8/09 Fred and Carol Scott joined the church—they moved to Kansas several years ago.

Your reporter has been going through thousands (literally) of photos as a way of using time wisely during the pandemic/quarantine and found a darling one of **Rose** and **Vivian Summerlin** from ten years ago and sent it to their parents **Elizabeth Freese** and **Talley Summerlin**. **Elizabeth** and **Talley** were delighted with the picture and **Talley** sent back this update on the family. “**Vivian** is a junior in high school here in Madison, NJ. She is a ridiculously good student and has been on varsity Cross Country, Basketball, and Track teams since her freshman year. Like most teens, the pandemic has been tough on her socially, but she is making do with her "quaranteams" each sports season and scheduling lots of cold walks and long FaceTime sessions with friends. **Rose** is a freshman at the University of Vermont and loves it - Go Catamounts! (she is home now for the break but it is clear she is ready to be back in the dorm and away from us!). She is studying a mix of anthropology, sociology and linguistics with an eye on better understanding the anthropology of autism (she was officially diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum not too long after we moved to NJ). She has turned her unique POV on the world of autism into a bit of a cottage industry on Instagram with a few friends where they have 77,000 followers (including **Greta Thunberg!**). **Elizabeth** is now Dr. **Elizabeth Freese** as of May, 2019, when she earned

her PhD in the Sociology of Religion from **Drew**. Since then her dissertation has been slowly undergoing transformation into a book(s), she has been teaching various sociology classes (at both Keane and Drew Universities), and has recently been doing very interesting and impactful research on reproductive rights through some fellowship work with Auburn Seminary in NYC. On top of that she has been playing estate executor for her father's affairs (mostly for his New Mexico cabin) as his health has declined. She is a sort of Professor and Property Manager rolled into one lately. In April, I will celebrate my 9th year with my current agency PR firm in NYC - even though I have not set foot in the office since March 10, 2020. We've been fortunate that our particular type of work has allowed us to all work remotely and keep doing our jobs despite the pandemic challenges. It has been hard but I can't say I miss my commute into Manhattan (though some days I do miss that NYC energy, if I'm being honest). I'm still playing and writing songs in some form or another - the pandemic threw us off our game, but for several years we were holding a live music and beer appreciation night at our home to raise money for our fellowship - more on this below...). We've been members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Morristown, NJ, for about 6 years - we've held various leadership roles over that time and I am a religious education teacher, which keeps me engaged with the 4-6th graders. Our Austin memories are vivid and fond and our time with you all at the Congregational Church there was a huge part of that. We promise to not wait another 10 years to catch you up on things up here!”



9/26/10 Vivian and Rose Summerlin at church ten years ago with roses from the wedding celebration cake for Robin Rosson and Julia Ross

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



12/25/20 Vivian and Rose Summerlin this Christmas—what a difference ten years makes!!!

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Tom VandeStadt has been our caring pastor for nearly 20 years. In early December, after much prayer and thought, he let us all know that he was planning to resign and “retire” as of the last Sunday in February. This call from **Tom’s** soul affects us all and we wish him and **Robin** well in their new endeavors. The church is now well into the process of setting up a transitional search committee. It will be a challenging time for us all, but we are blessed with excellent and committed leadership. Here is a brief look back to 2001 (thanks to **Dave Ross** for finding the annual report).

From the Annual Report of 2001

Dennis Murphy reported for the Pastoral Search Committee, thanking the committee for their work. They have met 18 times, distributed 30 copies of the profile to potential candidates, and received 11 replies. **Rollin Russell** (Note--a former conference minister and member of this church who was teaching at Lancaster Seminary—and father of **Stephen Russell**) has found three possible candidates in Lancaster, PA. It is not too late to recommend candidates.

Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ CONGREGATIONAL MEETING JUNE 10, 2001

Moderator **John Moore** called the meeting to order at 11:51 A.M. and distributed copies of the church's personnel policy, the Pastor's job description, and the compensation package to be offered to the Pastoral candidate if he is elected.

On behalf of the Pastoral Search committee, **Dennis Murphy** presented the name of the Reverend **Thomas J. VandeStadt** and moved that he be elected as our new Pastor.

Discussion on this motion was postponed so that we could consider candidates for church membership. **David Ross** moved that the motion be tabled until this could be done. The motion to table was approved.

Joseph McMillan, on behalf of the Deacons, introduced the Reverend **Wilmer Brown** and **Hulen Brown** and moved that they be accepted for church membership, effective immediately, with the installation ceremony to take place later in the month or early in July. This motion was approved unanimously and enthusiastically by voice vote.

The motion to elect Reverend **VandeStadt** was again taken up, and **Doyal Pinkard** and **Rambie Briggs** expressed their support. **John Towery** noted that **Tom** is about the age **John** was when he arrived in 1959. **Dennis Murphy** introduced the other members of the Search committee, **Sharon Brown**, **John Burlinson**, **Paul Deisler**, **Lynne Lemley**, **Tommie Pinkard**, **Karl Putz**, and **Suzanne Vanderpoel**, and expressed appreciation for their work. **John Burlinson** in turn thanked **Dennis** for his leadership and hard work. **Dennis** also introduced Rev. **Mark Miller**, the Conference Minister, and thanked him for his help.

A count of members confirmed that a quorum sufficient to elect a Pastor was present. Paper ballots were distributed, collected, and tallied by **John Moore** and **David Ross**. The result was an affirmative vote of fifty-six (56) to zero (0), and the Reverend **VandeStadt** was duly elected. **John Moore** announced the results. **Tom** returned and enthusiastically accepted the call. His wife, **Robin Chapman**, and daughter **Alex** plan to arrive in Austin in mid-July, with **Tom** himself arriving a few weeks later. A spontaneous chorus of "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" ensued.

Following a motion by **Doyal Pinkard** (**Pat Oakes** being absent) the meeting adjourned at 12:15 P.M.

David W. Ross, Clerk, 6/11/01

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



8/19/2001 Tom VandeStadt preaching on his first Sunday at the church



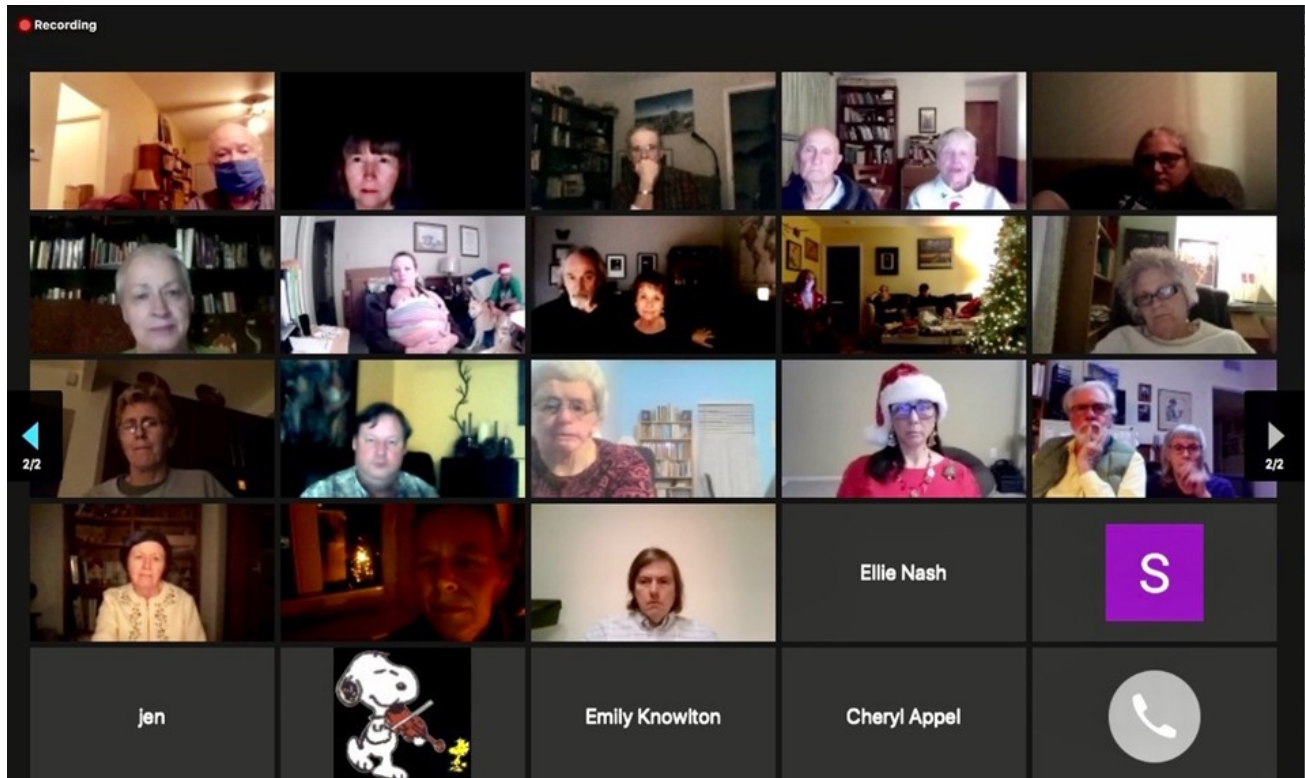
12/20/15 Robin Chapman and Tom VandeStadt with their daughter Alex at coffee hour



2/23/20 Confirmation service--Jen Howicz, Faye Dierksen, John Goff, Pam, Savanna, and Harrison Tucker, Allison Goodgame-Tucker, Lynne Lemley, and Pastor Tom VandeStadt —just weeks before the pandemic arrived

Photo on next page

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



12/20/20 Folks at the Zoom candlelight/carol service--Chester Rosson, Carol Burlinson, Tom VandeStadt, George Carruthers and Marilyn Gaddis, CJ Wood, Sarah Darter, Faye with Deek and Andy Dierksen, Christine Tata, ?, Lynne Lemley. Pam Tucker, Jaime Hadley, Carolyn Thompson, Andrea Low, Rambie and Fran Briggs, Marilyn Vaché, Ellie Nash, Sarah Oakes, Jen Howicz, ?, Emily Knowlton, Cheryl Appel and Debbie Appel