

THE VISITOR

February 2020

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



Blessed are the poor in spirit. Relying on our own resources, we realize our resources are insufficient for meeting the challenge we're facing, whatever it is life's demanding of us. We're in crisis, a time of danger and opportunity. The danger is we give up. The harsh reality or daily grind overwhelms us like a wave and pulls us into a sea of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness. But it's also an opportune time to call out to God—give me strength, give me courage, give me wisdom, because mine's not enough. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn. Losing who we love, what we love, is part of life. We mourn who and what we lose. The more we love, the more we lose, the more we mourn. But some people, because of where they live or who they are, lose more than others, more often, and more unfairly, which means they bear an unfair burden of mourning. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek. Meek is a way of being in this world, a way of relating to other people, a way of walking on this earth—gently, with care and sensitivity. Being meek doesn't mean being a pushover, it means not pushing others over. It doesn't mean letting others step on you, it means not stepping on others. It doesn't mean being weak, it means not preying on the weakness of others. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Not to just be hungry and thirsty, but to ache with *hunger* and *thirst* with all your body. Food and water is *all you think about!* Who aches for righteousness? Those to whom something wrong is being done. Those whose lives—whose bodies, minds, hearts, spirits—are being violated, abused, oppressed, or exploited by others. They ache for the wrong to stop, for their lives to be made right. That's all they think about. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful. Out of a deep appreciation for the human condition, for human imperfection, for the way life circumstances shape people's lives, you decide not to punish someone for doing wrong or causing harm. You may hold another accountable for what they've done, seek restorative justice, but not punitive justice. You give another a break, another chance, an opportunity to make things right, a new lease on life. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Uncontaminated by self-absorption, desire, envy, and lies. And whole. Pure hearted is whole-hearted, not half-hearted. Love God with all your heart, Jesus said, not part of your heart. All the time, not half the time. One who loves whole-heartedly, with a wholly uncontaminated heart, is holy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers. People have conflicts with other people. It's part of life—one's self-interest conflicts with another's self-interest.

Some people enter life born into a cycle of conflict, where generations of enemies fight continuously for the upper hand and avenge every loss. Some conflict can't be avoided, or shouldn't be avoided. Jesus came into conflict with people in his society. When Jesus said, love your enemy, it's because he had enemies, and he knew that anyone who followed him would have enemies. How shall we treat our enemies? How shall we seek peace in the midst of conflict? Love, Jesus said. Whole-hearted love, not half-hearted love. And mercy. And righteousness. And meekness. And God's help and strength. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus. Those whom others ridicule, mock, hate, and punish because they envision the world Jesus envisioned, live the way Jesus lived, relate to others the way Jesus related to others, teach what Jesus taught, resist what Jesus resisted, try to change what Jesus tried to change. Those who contradict society, contradict their family, their friends, their boss, contradict their government, contradict the dominant view of reality, in Christ-like ways, and for doing so are scorned, abused, ostracized, or crucified by others. Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Tom

March Visitor Deadline February 21, 2020

Church Leadership

Deacons Chair	*Pending*
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 February

by Liz Nash

Bethany Congregational UCC in San Antonio has called **Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Moncrief** to serve as their minister. **Pastor Jacque** will be moving to San Antonio from the Virginia side of the Washington, DC area. She begins her ministry there on April 1st. We rejoice with Bethany at the beginning of this new era in their ministry and look forward to welcoming **Pastor Jacque** into the Heart of Texas Association.

Bethany is also saying farewell to their interim minister of the past three years, **Rev. Tom Robison**. **Tom**, who has been “on loan” to us from the Lutherans, has served Bethany with grace and wisdom. He has helped the church through its long search process and has been a key part of the welcome and partnership Bethany has had with the pastors of our new church start, **Rev. Billie Watts** and **Pastor Kerry Kirtley**, as they have come into the UCC and started Touchstone Community Church. **Tom** has been a friend to me personally, and I am grateful for his ministry at Bethany.

Our Heart of Texas Committee on Ministry, at its January meeting, welcomed **Brett Hart** as a Member in Discernment. **Brett**, a member of St. Peter’s Church of Coupland, has served as a pastor for many years. After being the pastor of several Assembly of God congregations, he served for a number of years at Hope Chapel in Austin and as the senior pastor of Doxology Church, a church plant associated with Hope Chapel. In addition, **Brett** has significant experience teaching, starting schools and an education-related business, and in spiritual direction. Currently, he and his wife, **Kay**, have started the Serene Disciple Project (with videos available on YouTube) at their home at Egret Isle Farm near Coupland. As a child,

he was part of a Congregational Church, and he has now come “full circle” in finding a home in the UCC. **Brett** brings a deep and varied Christian ministry experience, and we welcome him as a Member in Discernment.

Our Committee on Ministry also welcomed **Dr. Gus Lott** as a Member in Discernment. **Gus** is currently a Master of Divinity student at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He is a member and a student minister at Trinity Church of Austin. **Gus** comes to us with a background in neuroscience and robotics, having earned his PhD in biophysics. He comes to us with a creative, seeking faith as he continues on his path in the synthesis of science and theology.

Finally, our prayers are with **Rev. Jacqueline Lamensky** as she recovers from a recent car wreck. Her car was totaled, but as of the time I write this article, it appears that her injuries are not major. Several members of her congregation, Evangelical Church of Lyons, came right away to help her. I am grateful for the care that her church has shown her, and hope that she will be fully recovered very soon.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals
by Pat Oakes

Several months ago, **Jonathan Geer** and his husband **Roberto Hernandez** shared that they were hoping to adopt a baby soon. They were matched with a mother-to-be and the baby boy was due in December. They got a call in early November on a Sunday morning during trio rehearsal that the baby was coming early and they immediately headed for Houston to meet their son. Sadly, the birth-mom, whom they had met a week earlier, changed her mind before the 72 hour deadline and decided to keep the baby. Needless to say, they were devastated as were we all. This wonderful announcement came from **Jonathan** on the 16th of January. "**Roberto** and I have the most wonderful news for the next edition of the Visitor! We are now proud parents of a beautiful baby girl :):) Her name is **Xitlali Nicole Hernandez-Geer** (first name pronounced seat-LAH-lee). It all happened so fast. She was born January 13th around 8 a.m. (one day after **Jonathan's** birthday). We got an e-mail from the director of the adoption agency around 12 p.m. that Monday, the 13th; asking us whether or not we wanted our profile to be shown to the birth mom. We decided that we were ready to try again, so we said YES. Later that same evening we got a call telling us that the birth mom had chosen us as the adoptive parents! So, Tuesday morning we headed down to the hospital in Corpus Christi to meet the baby. We also had a brief meeting with the birth mom and I think we all felt really good about the adoption. She seemed

very emotionally stable and at peace with the decision she had made. Everything went incredibly smoothly and we were able to go home with **Xitlali** early on the afternoon of the 15th. We feel so blessed and indescribably happy to be parents. And we also feel so fortunate to have such a wonderful support network through the church. **Xitlali** will be well-loved!" **Jonathan** had celebrated his 40th birthday on Sunday, the 12th—what a birthday gift he and **Roberto** have been given! We can't wait for **Xitlali** to make her debut at church.



1/16/20 3 day old Xitlali Nicole Hernandez-Geer with her proud parents, Roberto and Jonathan



1/12/20 Sara Ross wishing Jonathan Geer happy 40th birthday--neither realizing how Jonathan and Roberto's lives would change the very next day

Even though it is not the way **Barbara Burnham** had planned it, her retirement will be effective on January 31. She worked as a psychologist for Deer Oaks, A Behavioral Health Organization, for more than 9 years. Prior to that, she was in private practice and before that, in a group that specialized in psychological interventions in hospitals. Unfortunately, she has been forced to retire due to a severe ankle injury, which is not compatible with walking a mile or more a day in large nursing homes! Nevertheless, it is what it is. Looking forward, she expects to have at least one knee replacement this year. When she has finally become a bionic woman, she plans to spend time continuing to make blankets and quilts for Project Linus and spending more time with her grandchildren and friends, as well as participating in electoral politics. The transition has been abrupt, though she is enjoying not having to set an alarm most days!

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Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

She has deeply appreciated the many people who have helped her during the time she has been wearing her fancy space boot to help her ankle heal. **Barbara** says, "Your assistance and friendship have gone a long way in helping me to recover." We all wish you well, **Barbara!**

In late December during a Sunday service punctuated by a variety of congregational sneezes and sniffles, **Pastor Tom** challenged choir director (and wonderful creator of songs for special occasions) **Nodie Murphy** to write a song about cedar fever. She came up with this treasure in January which the whole church sang with great gusto—and a few coughs and sneezes. Do not despair. Cedar season is usually over by Valentine's Day—maybe a little later. Enjoy!

Ode to Cedar Fever (sung to the tune of "Ode to Joy")

Orangey pollen, you're the reason
That we sniffle here today.
Mighty cedar fever season
Over us now has its sway.
Coughing, sneezing, hoarseness, wheezing, Head-
aches, tiredness, near despair-- All of this is most un-
pleasant While you frolic in the air.

Austin, Texas, is the nexus
Drawing to its vital core
Arts, live music, education,
Government and so much more.
But, alas, its prime location
Here between the hills and plains
Fosters plants, mold, inflammation,
Allergies and breathing pains.

Let us all now join together
Facing this almighty foe,
And, no matter what the weather,
Tell this pollen where to go!
Block your coughs and blow your noses,
Neti pot your sinus clear.
Soon we'll all be smelling roses
When delightful Spring is here!

Andrea Low and her husband **Paul Toyozaki** had a great time in Florida over the Christmas holidays. They especially enjoyed their trip to Disney World where they got to meet their favorite characters.



12/19 L-R Mickey Mouse, Paul Toyozaki and his wife Andrea Low, and Minnie Mouse at Disney World

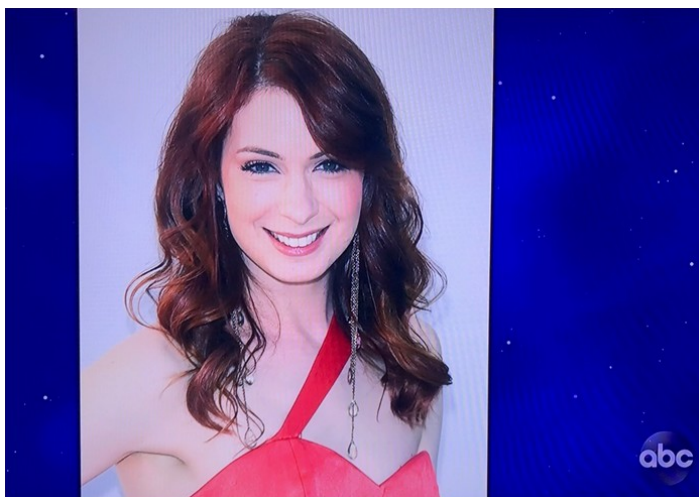
The **Appel-Knowlton** family (**Debbie, Bob, Emily and Sam**) and **Cheryl Appel** were back in town for a few days over the New Year's holiday, catching up with friends here and working in a trip to the NASA Space Center in Houston. They had all hoped to be in church on Sunday, the 5th, but they had to catch an early flight. However, they arranged for **Amy Harris** to sing a favorite song of **Vic's** which we all enjoyed—"What a Wonderful World." It was supposed to have been sung for his memorial service, but did not work out that day. **Amy** did a wonderful job—and as she finished, after a short pause, a male voice came from the congregation saying, "Well done!!" Through some tears, we all laughed and smiled and remembered our dear friend, **Vic Appel**. If you would like to hear **Amy**, please click here,

https://chi-node30.websitehostserver.net/~patandme/CCAHistory/Images-ChurchSite/VicAndJeanAppel_files/Amy%20Harris%20Its%20awonderful%20World%201_5_2020.mp4

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Who would have thought that someone from our church family would be featured in a question on the recent ABC Jeopardy Greatest Of All Time tournament on Jan. 7th, but it is indeed true. The clue was, “In ‘You’re Never Weird On The Internet (Almost),’ this Queen of the Geeks tells of her rise to stardom.” The answer was “Who is **Felicia Day**?” **Felicia**, a UT student majoring in music performance and math, was our church violinist during the late 1990s making beautiful music with **Florence Castle** and **Robin Rosson** among others.



1/7/20 Former church violinist Felicia Day was featured in a question on the recent Jeopardy special Greatest Of All Time (GOAT) tournament.

Congratulations to **Beth Placek**'s husband **Chencho Flores** who was inducted into the Tejano Roots Museum Hall of Fame (in Alice, TX) along with his band who received the Conjunto Tradicional Award. **Chencho** (who turned 90 on June 2nd), **Frank Flores**, **Augie Arreola**, **Vicente Alonzo**, and **John Mayalec** make up the band. **Chencho** had insisted that he didn't want to go to the ceremony on Jan. 3. At the last minute, his granddaughter persuaded him to go—too late for **Beth** to make arrangements, but **Chencho** and his granddaughter went and enjoyed Tejano music and seeing and hearing players from all over—and he brought home a big trophy.

Betty and **Bill Phillips** report that they are doing OK—good days and other days not so good, but they keep on going. They are enjoying life at daughter **Katy**'s place in Creedmoor. They are

seeing more of **Katy** as she resigned from her job as public works director in Sunset Valley where she worked for 23 years. She is looking for other work opportunities but is enjoying more free time for the moment. The small ranch is home not only to **Katy**, **Betty** and **Bill**, but also two horses, a pig and three dogs. Daughter **Stephanie Phillips** is running for office again in the Democratic primary on March 3rd for the Texas House seat in District 73 which includes Comal, Gillespie, and Kendal counties in the Texas hill country. She is an adjunct professor at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin and is also doing some conducting and teaching viola to private students. She is the music director at Faith UCC in New Braunfels, too.

The amazing **Nancy Brown** will celebrate her 100th birthday on Sunday, February 16th. She would love to hear from folks who remember her. Do send her a note or a card—it will really make her smile. Her address is Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Room 312, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Dr., Austin TX, 78753.



2/16/19 Last year Delta Sigma Theta sorority sister Catherine Lee giving Nancy Brown, 99, her lit birthday cupcake while Anita Swain looks on

Long-time members and friends of **David Cleaver-Bartholomew** remember when he was **Rev. John Towery**'s intern in the late 1980s. **David** and his wife **Dena** both have new jobs and have moved to Providence, RI. **Dena**, an Episcopal priest, has accepted a call to serve as the Canon to the Ordinary in the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. **David** has

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

just accepted an offer to become the Transitional Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Financial Development for the newly created Southern New England Conference of the UCC. Daughter **Audrey** is halfway through her second year at Boston College Law School. She and her fiancé **Matt Ciadella** were married in January with both **David** and **Dena** officiating and her sister **Lydia** as maid of honor. **Lydia** has spent a year as an Episcopal Service Corps volunteer and has worked with Community Refugee and Immigration Services and AmeriCorps as a community engagement specialist. **David** sends his best to all those who remember his work at the church.

Mel and **Pat Oakes** enjoyed a quick New Year's trip to Vicksburg, **Mel's** home town. They drove two days each way and spent two days there. The trip was a twofer as not only did they get to see **Mel's** brothers and their wives and other Oakes family members, but they also were able to rendezvous with daughter **Beth**, her husband **Eugene**, and **Emily**, 19, and **Ethan**, 16, who were returning to Iowa City after a reunion in New Orleans with **Eugene's** siblings and their families. Thirteen of them got together on the first night for dinner at Anchuca, an antebellum mansion, now a bed and breakfast and restaurant owned and operated by **Tom Pharr**, son of brother **Donald's** wife **Bettye**. It was gorgeously decorated for the holidays which was a real treat.



12/30/19 In the parlor at Anchuca after a wonderful dinner at the restaurant there—Eugene and Beth, Mel and Pat, Ethan and Emily in Vicksburg, MS

New Year's Eve, eleven of them gathered at brother **Donald's** home where the three brothers, **Mel**, **Floyd**, and **Donald**, regaled the family for two hours telling stories of growing up on their dad's junk yard and auto parts place—**Oakes** Auto Parts. The next day, both **Emily** and **Ethan** commented that they could not believe how much fun it was to listen to stories about cars and other adventures for such a long time! The southern art of storytelling lives on.

Our former cellist **Colin Ferguson** had an interesting birthday on Jan. 25th. He was playing in the Austin Opera's production of "Everest," an exciting new opera based on the book **Into Thin Air** by **Jon Krakauer**. While he was busy practicing the challenging and beautiful music of the opera, his wife **Eli** took their daughter **Soneto** (who at almost three calls herself **Soso**) went to Barcelona for three weeks to visit **Eli's** family there. **Colin** noticed that **Soso's** Spanish improved markedly while there.



Eli, Soneto (Soso) and Colin Ferguson

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

Rich and **Jane Thompson** were in town from their Ft. Collins, CO, home for several days in late January. **Rich** made a presentation on Jan. 26 to the Sunday school class at Central Presbyterian on “The Spirituality of **Mr. Rogers**” where he was pastor for many years. After he retired, he was our interim pastor for four months in 1995 and then again for six months in 2001, so he knows many of our long-time members and says hello to one and all. He had hoped to speak at our church, too, on the 26th, but that was the day for the church annual meeting. **Rich** met **Mr. Rogers** in 1998 when he was at a meeting in Pittsburgh with Presbyterian Communicators. Someone asked if he would like to meet **Mr. Rogers** and he jumped at the lucky chance. We’ll work on getting them back here for another visit so that we can hear more about **Mr. Rogers**. Both couples were delighted to learn that they both had freshman granddaughters at Smith—**Raina** for the **Thompsons** and **Emily** for the **Oakeses**.



1/26/20 Jane and Rich Thompson at dinner at Gusto in Austin with Pat and Mel Oakes

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Inveterate sleuth **Mel Oakes** found these three articles from the Austin American-Statesman archives. Be sure and read all the way to the end of this small 1st article. **Mel’s** comment was, “Apparently old church restrooms were a bit larger.” It looks like it was probably **choir** practice instead of chair practice. The dates on the 2nd two clippings don’t seem that they are chronological and we are mystified as to what was built to begin with. We will be taking a trip to the Austin History Center to see what we can unearth there—hoping to find some information and maybe some papers of Hugo Kuehne who was related to Hildegard Kuehne Everett.



2/7/1920 Austin American-Statesman Y.P.S.C.E is the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour.

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History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, (cont.)

WORK WILL START SOON ON CONGREGATIONAL CH.

Construction work will start Tuesday on the Sunday School room and chapel, the two sections of the First Congregational Church which will be the first units of the new building to be erected at San Antonio and Twenty-third Streets. These two units will cost \$25,000. Later the church proper will be built. Hugo Kuehne is the architect and Albert Mundt is the contractor for the new building.

The members of the First Congregational Church sold their old church at Ninth and Colorado Streets some time ago, and since that time have been awaiting the building of their new church home.

7/2/1923 Austin American-Statesman. The early construction on the new site at 23rd and San Antonio

LOCAL CHURCH BUYS RECTOR PROPERTY IN UNIVERSITY SECTION

Work on New First Congregational Church Building to Begin Immediately.

Purchase of the old University faculty club house property located at Twenty-third and San Antonio streets from J. Bouldin Rector by the First Congregational Church was announced this morning by Rev. Almon O. Stevens, pastor of the church, which is temporarily worshipping at the University Young Men's Christian Association building.

The newly acquired property is 70 feet wide and 120 feet deep and is the site selected for the new church edifice to be erected by the First Congregational Church. The consideration was announced by Rev. Mr. Stevens as \$10,000.

Work is to begin immediately on the construction of the first unit consisting of a chapel and a parish house with accommodations to serve the religious needs of University students of that faith. Later the new church and auditorium will be erected. While the first unit is being built east of the present building, the house now on the property will be used as a minister's home and parish house.

The first unit is to be ready for occupancy with the opening of the fall term of the University next September, Rev. Mr. Stevens stated.

3/8/1923 Austin American-Statesman Purchase of the old University Faculty Club property at 23rd and San Antonio