

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

408 West Twenty-third Street, Austin, Texas 78705-5214

(512) 472-2370

E-mail: ucausti@swbell.net

Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



The beginning began when God began beginning everything that's ever begun. Everything that begins, begins with God, begins in God. Without God nothing begins, nothing begins outside God. God begins life. Life begins with God, life begins in God. Without God no life begins, no life begins outside God. God is life, life shining as light, light that shines in every person. The darkness in which people live, and the darkness inside of people, does not overcome the light. The light shines in the darkness.

That's my Very Very Heavily Revised Version—the VVHRV—of the opening to John's Gospel. One of the big revisions that I make to John's prologue is that I don't refer to God as the Word the way John does. In the beginning was the Word, John tells us. But John goes on to say, the Word was God. Well, since the Word was God, I just stick to the word God instead of referring to God as the Word.

I know that by removing the term the Word from the prologue, I'm removing the prologue's Christological element, which completely alters the prologue's intent and meaning, because the whole point of John's prologue is to establish Christ's divine identity. So be it. My Very Very Heavily Revised Version just doesn't have a Christological element. It's simply a short hymn celebrating God's existence as life that shines as light in all people.

Another big revision that I make is my use of the present tense. John writes in the past tense—God created in the past, long ago, in the beginning. But I experience God creating in the present tense all the time. God beginning new beginnings, all the time. God beginning new life, new life beginning in God, all the time. God alive, shining life in all people, all the time. Not just in the past, when all beginning began. But in the beginning of every beginning. In the beginning of every new life, in all that's alive, all the time.

Yes, during Christmas, we remember that a child named Jesus was born a long time ago in a land far away. We commemorate his birth, and give thanks for its special significance. But in Epiphany, as we celebrate the light that always shines, and the God who's still speaking, let's be mindful that God is beginning new beginnings all the time, including right now. God is birthing new life today—coming to life as new life, coming to life as new ways of living.

So I pray in this Epiphany season, as we enter a new year, may you celebrate a new beginning. A new beginning begun for you *by* God. A new beginning for you *with* God.

TOM

February Visitor Deadline January 25, 2021

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
January
by Liz Nash

Faith UCC in New Braunfels is undergoing a major transition. As of January 1, 2021, **Scott Martin** will be retiring as Pastor. **Scott** is a friend to many of us. He leaves Faith with our great appreciation for his ministry and many good wishes. The church has called **Carla Cheatham** to be their Designated Term Pastor. This is a type of transitional pastor that is charged with helping the church move toward specific goals, with the possibility of being considered as the settled (called and more permanent) pastor if both sides agree. **Carla** is the author of *Hospice Whispers: Stories of Life* and leads the **Carla Cheatham** Consulting Group, which trains people in caregiving fields in ethical caregiving. She has served in hospice and parish ministry. We join Faith and **Carla** in great hope for their work and future in ministry together.

Our Association Committee on Ministry has granted **Amelia Fulbright** "Seeking Privilege of Call" status in the United Church of Christ. This status means that **Amelia**, who was ordained at First Baptist Church of Austin, has been recommended for ordained ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ by our Committee on Ministry and will have an Ecclesiastical Council to be voted on for ministerial standing at our Association Spring Meeting. She will also be seeking a call to ministry in a UCC church. **Amelia** is currently the Designated Senior Pastor at University Baptist Church in Austin, where she served as the Associate Minister earlier in her ministry for several years. Before her current work, she was the founding Executive Director of Labyrinth Progressive Student Ministries at the University of Texas at Austin. Labyrinth is supported by a number of Austin area churches including Congregational Church of Austin and Church of the Savior, among others. **Amelia** put together Labyrinth and the coalition of supporting churches to form a powerful ministry that offers worship, Bible study, meditation, and community to students who are devout, questioning, and on a journey. We welcome **Amelia** to the Heart of Texas Association.

I rejoice to share with you that **James Pennington**, Senior Pastor of First Church UCC of Phoenix, Arizona, will begin his tenure as Executive Director of Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi,

on February 22, 2021. The Back Bay Mission Board has had a gratitude-filled time of farewell with retiring Executive Director **Alice Graham**, whose work has been transformative and excellent. As many of you know, Back Bay Mission is a partner ministry with the United Church of Christ, does magnificent outreach work among the poorest people of the area, and hosts work camps for mainly UCC groups from across the country. **James** comes with extensive non-profit leadership experience prior to becoming a UCC minister. At First Church, he has led a ministry that expanded the church's outreach to those with no place to live, to refugees, and as a leading institution advocating for those with the least voice and poorest among us. I feel a special joy in making this announcement after serving on the search committee that recommended him. I hope many of us will find a way to get out to Biloxi to see and be part of doing God's work at Back Bay Mission.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals by Pat Oakes

Those who don't believe in Christmas miracles have not met **Nodie Murphy** and her staff of angels! We had all given up the idea of having a "real" candlelight and carol service at the church when someone (who?) suggested we could have one on Zoom. Nodie was asked, she said we could try and see what happens. So, on Sunday evening, Dec. 20th, it all came together—with **Nodie** as chief organizer, ably assisted by **René Slataper** (tech person), **Donna Cravens** (office manager who got the program together and attached all the hymns), and **Jonathan Geer** and his wonderful music. A rehearsal, organized by **Joy Penticuff**, was held on Sunday afternoon and that evening it went on without a hitch. **Sarah Bentley** led the service—lighting the Advent candles she had ordered on-line. Readers included **John Burlinson**, **Warinda Harris**, **Stephen Russell**, **Ann Locasio**, **Dennis Murphy**, and **Kay Pruett**. **Bill Beardall** provided a beautiful musical interlude singing "What Child is This" while

accompanying himself on the guitar. **Xitlali Hernandez-Geer** showed her appreciation of that by dancing happily on **Roberto's** lap. There was even a nativity scene featuring **Deek Dierksen** with his parents **Faye** and **Andy**. We had quite a number of out-of-town guests including **Michael Ross** in Florida, **Debbie Appel Knowlton** and **Emily Knowlton** in North Salem, NY, **Cheryl Appel** in Wisconsin, **Ellie Nash** in Montreal, **Sarah Oakes** in Virginia, **Lisa Kirch** in Alabama, **George Carruthers** and **Marilyn Gaddis** in San Marcos, **Whit** and **Betty Bodman** in Whitefish, MT, and **Marilyn Vaché** in Connecticut. The most dedicated attendee was **Jaana Rehbein** who tuned in at 3 a.m. from Germany. All in attendance were invited to dim their house lights, light a few candles, and join in singing the hymns (only **Jonathan** could be heard) alone, but together. After the service ended, we all sat quietly in our homes for several minutes and then created our own "parties" while staying on Zoom to visit and reminisce together.



12/20/20 Some of the attendees at the church Zoom candlelight carol service--Joy Penticuff, Mel and Pat Oakes, Ann Locasio, Sarah Bentley, John Burlinson, Dennis Murphy, René Slataper, Jonathan Geer, Roberto Hernandez holding their daughter Xitlali, Nodie Murphy, Warinda Harris, Bill Beardall, Kay Pruett, Stephen Russell, Ellie Nash, Sara and Dave Ross, Scott Neely, Lynn Chavarria, Lisa Kirch, Betty and Whit Bodman, Barbara Burnham and Chester Rosson, Carol Burlinson, Tom VandeStadt, George Carruthers and Marilyn Gaddis, CJ Wood

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



12/20/20 Nativity scene with Deek Dierksen and his parents Faye and Andy



12/20/2020 John Burlinson reading from the book of Luke

A great deal of planning went into creating the Christmas dinner for the homeless this year. So many things had to be considered in trying to figure out how to do it safely. It was decided to estimate that there might be about 80 folks show up. In the end, because it was hard to advertise, only about 20 folks came, but the extra food was shared later in the afternoon with homeless folks in various encampments around Austin. **Lynn Chavarria** and **Jaime Hadley** worked with **Whit Bodman** (before he left for Montana) on scoping out restaurants open in the area on Christmas Day (none), so it was decided to use gift cards from P. Terry's or Taco Shack. Cookie bakers included **Jamie Hadley**, **Lynn Chavarria**, **John Goff**, **Pat Oakes**, **Joy Penticuff**, **Ann Locasio**, **Sarah Darter**, **Amy Harris**, **Carolyn Thompson**, **Jen Howicz**, and **Faye Dierksen**. Folks on the duty roster on Christmas Day were **Pam**, **Savanna**, and **Harrison Tucker** (they were the Turkey Team) and **Jen Howicz**, **John Goff**, and **Jaime**, (the Ham Team). **Beth Placek** was in charge of handing out

socks (**Lynn C.** and **John G.** brought the socks). The food/goodie bags were all arranged by **Jaime** in the nursery the day before (all except the sandwiches from Thundercloud Subs which **Jaime** picked up late Thursday and the helpers added to the bags on Christmas Day). Each bag also contained a \$15.00 gift card (in a color-coded baggie), plus an orange, bottled water, chips, other assorted snacks, Christmas cookies, a mask, and hand sanitizer. **Jim Howicz**, the **Tuckers**, and **Jaime** took what was left and delivered the bags to homeless folks who are living under the overpasses in Austin. Everyone is hoping that we will be able to go back to the traditional dinner next Christmas—that the pandemic will be over and that the huge numbers of homeless will have better access to new programs which will help them. Everyone was being so very careful to stay socially distant that there are no pictures of the helpers at the event, but we all know how hard folks worked to make the Covid Christmas dinner a success. Thank you from all of us for your Christmas gift!



12/25/2020 Christmas "dinner" at the church during the Covid 19 pandemic

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



12/25/2020 Visualize all the Covid 19 Christmas "dinner" helpers standing in the middle of the nursery surrounded by bags of food, hand sanitizer and treats

Pam Tucker reports that daughter **Savanna** was home for winter break and made it home from the University of Washington in Seattle just fine wearing the KN-95 mask while traveling. She is training very hard two–three hours per day to get ready for participating on the rowing team. They have recommended workouts for the team during this time. Her favorite course this term was a law and justice class. She still wants to be a lawyer. She is already working on **Harrison** to go there! **Pam** is always so pleased to see how close **Harrison** and **Savanna** are. During one church gathering on Zoom recently, **Warinda Harris** mentioned that her son **Alden** was looking there—**Pam** reported that **Savanna** would certainly recommend UW for **Alden**.



12/20 Siblings Harrison and Savanna Tucker

Both **Beth Gleason**, a chaplain at a large Baptist hospital in San Antonio and **CJ Wood**, a chaplain at Seton Main on 38th St. have received the first of their two shots for their COVID 19 vaccinations. Both are relieved and look forward to the time when they will be able to interact more closely with patients and their families.

Intrepid traveler **Whit Bodman** set out for Whitefish, MT, a day later than he had intended as he was intent on finishing his holiday workshop project—creating shoe horns for the family made from the oak of old pews. He notes, " The first half was smooth sailing. I slept in the car, which was as comfortable as in any camping experience. First night at a truck stop. Ate artisanal junk food at drive-throughs. Then the car began to flash warning lights: ABS not available, ESC and TCS need service! Check transmission!! The car was going fine, except the cruise control stopped working. I visited a Volvo place in Denver. Brief check showed no problems. Same in Fort Collins - I spent the second night behind the dealership. So I drove on to Whitefish with no other problem, except for that brief period in Polsin when the car wouldn't get out of second gear. Couldn't get up the driveway (at **Noah** and **Erin's** house where **Betty** has been helping with the twins) more than halfway. So **Noah** put sand down and drove it up. Better that he slide into a tree with **Betty's** (formerly) beloved car than me. So I am here with babies **Otis** and **Arlo**, the Wife, and parents **Noah** and **Erin**, working on shoulder muscles, sitting in front of the fire, and falling down on cross- country skis."



12/20 Woodworker Whit made Christmas presents for the family -- shoe horns out of old oak pews

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



12/26/20 l-r Otis and Arlo Bodman



12/27/20 Multitasking Betty Bodman reading to grandsons Arlo (in red) and Otis



12/25/20 Fabulous Christmas chaos in Whitefish, MT--On the sofa, from the left--the Bodmans' son, Noah has Arlo, daughter-in-law Erin is wearing antlers and Betty has Otis.

Barbara Burnham says, "I had my long-awaited first knee replacement on December 2nd and went home two days later. The surgery was at Seton Main, and I had a very good experience with the hospital staff and my surgeon, **Dr. David Michel**. As you know, physical therapy begins immediately! I started in the hospital, and since then have had therapy at my apartment two-three times a week. I'm doing well with it, in terms of flexibility, learning to negotiate stairs, etc. After the first of the year I will switch to outpatient therapy in a clinic. The big issue for me has been pain. I haven't been as comfortable as I would like, but I am surviving, and the pain is getting a little better. I had my one-month checkup with the doctor on December 29th, and we were both encouraged by my progress. **Chester** has been here helping me and cooking, and I am so appreciative! I've had a couple of socially distanced visits from our son **Robin** and his family. I have also appreciated the calls and emails from our congregation--it has otherwise been a lonely proposition. I haven't been able to participate in Fellowship, E-Slab, or our Racism reading group much, both because of concentration and discomfort, but I hope to be present more after the beginning of the year. As far as surgery on the other knee--can't even think about that yet!"

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Beth Placek has lived in Tarrytown, just a block from the post office, for 48 years, and, over time, has come to know the neighborhood very well. She has enjoyed receiving the free Tarrytown Neighbors magazine which comes every month. Recently she called the publisher, **Jerome Kubala**, to compliment him on recent stories in the magazine. They got to talking and exchanging Tarrytown stories, he asked **Beth** if she did any writing, she said she had, and he suggested she submit something for the February issue. She has done so and is looking forward to being published!! **Mr. Kubala** has suggested that she could become a regular contributor. Stay tuned!

Debby Kohrt was not able to see her Wisconsin grandchildren over the holidays—children of her son **Jarod** and his wife **Laurel**, but she did get to spend time with her Austin crew—daughter **Kristen** and **Jason Parkhill** and rapidly growing children, **Caleb** and **Zoey**. The **Parkhill** kids come by their enthusiasm for the Green Bay Packers from the Wisconsin branch of the family.



12/20 Wesley Kohrt, 3, grandson of Debby Kohrt, missed seeing his grandmother Debby this Christmas



12/20 16-month-old Brynn Kohrt, granddaughter of Debby Kohrt, enchanted by Christmas



12/20 8-year-old Zoey Parkhill, granddaughter of Debby Kohrt, was all decked out in her best Green Bay Packer gear to celebrate Christmas



12/20 Caleb Parkhill, now 5'9", Debby Kohrt's grandson, is cheering for the Green Bay Packers, too!

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Reuel and **Liz Nash** and daughter **Becky** had a special Christmas Eve. They decided to go to the Micah 6 HQ at University Presbyterian Church and volunteer at the food distribution event being held there. **Liz** and **Reuel** had expected to be handing out food, but instead were asked to work on data entry for the organization—3 1/2 hours worth—not quite what they expected, but they got a lot of work done. **Becky**, on the other hand, was handing out food with other volunteers outside, masked, and socially distant. It was a relatively warm evening, so it was OK. They are planning on going back on New Year's Eve (which will be much colder) to volunteer again. We all thank you!

Roberto, **Jonathan**, and **Xitlali** enjoyed a wonderful camping trip to Colorado Bend State Park planned by their good friends **Amelia** and **Sarah** who have planned a camping trip for every month this fall and been on all but one of them. They've enjoyed being outdoors so much and **Xitlali** has had a lot of new sensory experiences. On Christmas Eve Eve, they went to see the "Peppermint Parkway" light display at the F1 COTA racetrack, which is not too far from where they live. They spent more time waiting in line than they did driving through the light show, but it was a lot of fun. On Christmas Eve **Jonathan's** oldest brother **Matthew**, his wife **Rachel** and their six kids came to visit. They spent most of the day hanging out and making tamales. Later that evening after **Matthew** and family left, **Roberto's** cousin **Arturo**, his wife **Griselda** and their two kids, **Edgar** and **Dayanara** (who both have sung many times with the choir at church) came to visit for a few hours and enjoy some of the tamales.



12/12/20 Xitlali with her parents at Colorado Bend State Park—Gorman Falls in the background

They also got a little stuffed animal poodle for **Xitlali** that is one of her new favorite toys (as you can tell by the expression on her face!) **Jonathan** notes that it has been nice to have some time off to just decompress and unwind.



12/12/20 Xitlali with her parents at Colorado Bend State Park—Gorman Falls in the background



12/24/20 Xitlali with Roberto's cousin's wife Griselda and her new favorite toy—a cuddly poodle

Nancy Edison has isolated since March and living alone means she is enjoying her daily neighborhood walks even more, as she gets to actually say hello to other human beings (and their dogs). She's taken photos of trees changing color and bright red berries on bushes. She has three petite cats whose mother left them at her home as babies, and last week she babysat two angora rabbits for her son as they drove to Florida for a break. (She's not in favor of traveling at this time unless it is necessary, but she points out that she is of a different generation.) She sent her sister and remaining brother the

Personals (cont)

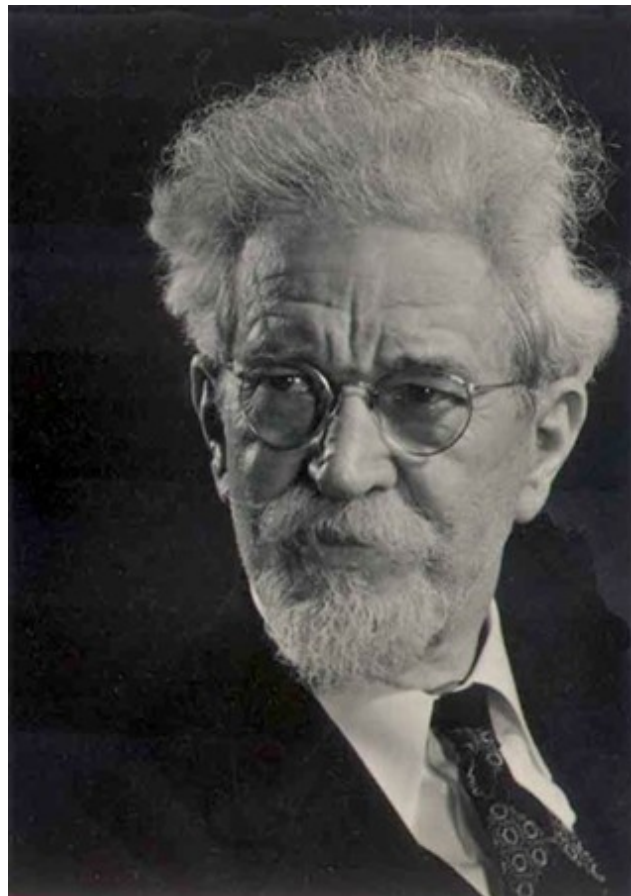
by Pat Oakes

same puzzle she got for herself, so they could work on them together apart, as putting a puzzle together while their mom cooked the holiday dinner was a family tradition. She didn't take into account that a 1000 piece puzzle might be a bit of a challenge for them. **Nancy's** sister is 13 years older than I she is and it may take her quite a while to do, so she's starting it now. Her brother may have adult children visiting who can help him with it as they celebrate Christmas. This is the first year she not working on a winter vegetable garden—we all remember wonderful produce she has brought to share with us—and caterpillars to show the children. She is still making masks and expects to make front window curtains soon. Never in a million years did **Nancy** ever dream that her daughter would become a teacher but there she is, teaching math and science like her mother before her. **Nancy** was a middle school teacher and her daughter is teaching high school. Life is a surprise.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Those who have been at the church for a while have probably attended the candlelight carol service usually held the Sunday before Christmas. The last hymn sung every year is “Silent Night,” (Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht)—written in German in Austria—words by the priest **Joseph Mohr** and melody by the choir director **Franz Gruber**. We always sing the first verse in German. Newcomers might wonder why we do that. There is a very good reason. Many of the early members of the church were of German descent and grew up in Texas but often spoke German at home. It is part of the heritage of this church. **Kathleen Strong’s** grandmother was **Josie Huppertz Trenckman**—she was born and raised in Austin and married **Mr. Trenckman** who was born and raised in the German community in Bellville, moved to Austin and met and married **Josie**. We remember **Josie** as the grande dame of the church when we arrived in 1964. **Hildegard Kuehne Everett** was the daughter of **John Matthias** and **Mary (Wild) Kuehne**. **Hildegard** remembered growing up speaking both German and English. That must have such a difficult time for so many. One wonders whether the hymn was sung in German during WWI and WWII.

Master sleuth **Mel Oakes** looked through old church directories and found the following German names up till about 1930—many of the folks and their families were part of the church for several generations (the church was established in 1901). Here are some of the last names he found — **Bickler, Ballinger, Huppertz, Krohn, Kuehne, Kue, Lockenwitz, Messer, Metz, Rotsch, Schacht, Trenckmann, VonRosenberg, Von Briesen, Winkler, Wild, Wupperman, Ziegler, Zadock, Zimplemann.**



About 1935 John Matthias Kuehne, a UT physics professor, the father of the late Hildegard Kuehne Everett, and one of the early members of this church

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



1945 Congregational church ladies gathering—Back--Meta Huppertz holding Stuart Strong, Emmy Huppertz (mother of Josie and Meta), Gertrude Rotsch, and Hanchen Kuehne Winkler; middle ?(behind the bush), Mary Kuehne, Emmy Apple-gate, Libby Strong in the lap of her grandmother Josie Trenckman ?, ?, Mrs Wupperman; front row--Margaret Lockenvitz, Gertrude Stolley, Emily Jo Strong (mother of the children and daughter of Josie), ?? Else Wupperman (wife of Walter)



About 1952 The Ladies Aid Society at the home of Mrs. J.M. Kuehne Bert Miller was pastor of the church between 1950 and 1957. I think this dates from the early 1950s--definitely taken in the winter or fall because of all of the coats. Perhaps the photo was taken by J.M. Kuehne (he was quite the photographer) as the meeting was at his and Mary's home. Back row--l-r--Mrs. Aarbengast, Mrs. E.P. Schoch, Mrs. Mick, ?, Mrs. B.F. Pittenger (Katharine Bickler), D.L. Clark, Mrs. Morgan Smith, Beulah Smith, Bert Miller (pastor) middle --Mrs. "Bo" Williams, Mrs. Wupperman, Mary Cassel, ?. Mary Kuehne, Mrs. Wooldridge, Marie Clark (wife of D.L. Clark), Elizabeth Ash, Erna Sieliger Front--Mrs. Stolloy, Mary Margaret Miller (wife of the pastor), Josie Trenckmann, Mrs. Rotsch, Mazie Bickler