

# THE VISITOR

June 2019

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

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



In his latest book, *The Second Mountain*, **David Brooks** takes up the issue of hyper-individualism. **Brooks** defines hyper-individualism as an unhealthy fixation on the individual, and the belief that each individual has a right to pursue his or her self-interest without restraint.

This view of human nature, this way of seeing the world and living in it, is tearing apart our nation's social fabric, **Brooks** argues. In our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, our nation's capital. And it's leaving lots of isolated and lonely individuals unhappy and agitated.

"We live in a culture of hyper-individualism," **Brooks** writes. "There is always a tension between self and society, between the individual and the group. Over the past sixty years we have swung too far toward the self. The only way out is to rebalance, to build a culture that steers people toward relation, community, and commitments—the things we most deeply yearn for, yet undermine with our hyper-individualistic way of life."

In his book, *Tribe*, **Sebastian Junger**, who studies veterans and the difficulties they have re-entering our society after military service in war zones, looks at our nation's unhealthy individualism from that perspective.

We take young people, many from neighborhoods where people don't know their neighbor's names, and we put them through an intensely grueling program that transforms their lives by binding them closely to the other people in their group. Then we send them to a war zone, where the stress of war binds them together even closer.

These young people, often for the first and only time in their lives, experience a deep and intimate bond with others. And they love it. It feels good. It meets a deep human need. It enables them to experience a deeper, fuller, richer way of being human.

After several years of this bonding, we send them back home, into those neighborhoods where most people don't know one another. Back into a hyper-individualistic society, where many experience, with grueling intensity, the pain of isolation and loneliness, the frayed and severed social fabric.

Then we diagnose them as if they're the ones with the problem. But it's our society that needs the diagnosis, **Junger** argues. It's our society that has the illness.

"A modern soldier returning from combat," **Junger** writes, "goes from the kind of close-knit group that humans evolved for, back into a society where most people work outside the home, children are educated by strangers, families are isolated from wider communities, and personal gain almost completely eclipses collective good. Even if he or she is part of a family, that is not the same as belonging to a group that shares resources and experiences almost everything collectively. Whatever the technological advances of modern society—and they're nearly miraculous—the individualized lifestyles that those technologies spawn seem to be deeply brutalizing to the human spirit."

I agree with **Brooks** and **Junger** that our society is suffering from an epidemic of hyper-individualism, and that we must seek to rebalance our society by building a culture that steers people toward relationships, community, and commitments, the things for which people most deeply yearn.

In a society suffering from an epidemic of loneliness, in which people are too often cut off to fend for themselves, and record numbers of people are taking their own lives or dying from diseases of despair (stress, alcoholism, drug addiction), it seems that one of the most pressing issues for the church is to rebalance our society by helping one another, and others, build and deepen relationships, community, and commitments.

In the church, we call this Holy Communion. It literally means *holy union with* and it's central to our identity. It's the exact opposite of you're on your own. It's what we humans most deeply desire. It's what Christ most deeply desires for us, and for all people.

May we as a church swim against the strong currents of our society by striving continuously not to become a bunch of individuals that congregate once a week, but a community of people whose lives are connected through bonds of care and commitment that are deep and strong.

Tom

### The United Church of Christ's All Church Read

The United Church of Christ is encouraging members of UCC churches to participate in the UCC All Church Read. And here's the book the UCC is encouraging its members to read: *Evicted, Poverty and Profit in the American City*, by **Matthew Desmond**. *Evicted* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2017, and **Mathew Desmond** will be the keynote speaker at the UCC General Synod this summer. If you're able, please read the book over the summer so we can discuss it together one Sunday after worship in the fall. Given our church's ministry to people who are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless and our advocacy for affordable housing and a living wage in our city, the book will hopefully inform our church's ministry.

## July - August Visitor Deadline July 29, 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
Youth Sunday School	Amy Kent Rivera
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

## Heart of Texas Association News

June

by Liz Nash

Our Association spring meeting at St. Paul UCC in Corpus Christi was a joyful gathering. The first outcome to announce is that we voted to **approve CJ Wood for ordination** during her Ecclesiastical Council, after hearing from **CJ** about her story, her theology, and her approach to ministry as a full time chaplain in the Christus Spohn Hospital Network. Her ordination to that call by the Heart of Texas Association will be on Sunday, June 9th, at 4 pm at St. Paul UCC in Corpus Christi. We hope several of you will be able to come and celebrate with **CJ**.

At our meeting, we had attendance from 15 of our churches, there either in person or on the Zoom internet link. Of course, several folks welcomed us from St Paul and served an excellent lunch, the time when we shared news from our churches. **Dana Worsham**, pastor of St. Paul, gathered us with inspiring worship. **Don Longbottom**, South Central Conference Minister, was with us and spoke. In addition, we voted to approve a \$1000 grant to Open Cathedral for their young adult ministries. We thanked outgoing Moderator **Janet Sherman** for the great work she has done and elected officers as follows: **Linda Coats** (Friends Congregational), Moderator; **Carl Schwartz-King** (United Christian), Vice Moderator; **Joe Ward** (Faith New Braunfels), Treasurer; and **Arlene Turner** (United Christian), Secretary. For our Committee on Ministry, we voted to affirm the Committee's appointment of **Tom VandeStadt** to replace **John Gage**, and to elect **Sid Hall** (Trinity Church of Austin) and **Maggie Gartner** (Friends Congregational) to three year terms. We are grateful to our nominating committee for their work in finding committed nominees. We are also grateful to **Charles Stark** and St. John's, Burton for hosting a gathering to attend by Zoom representing four churches; to **Reuel Nash** for putting in substantial time to get the Zoom setup to work well for us, to **Joe Ward** for helping with the audio, and to **Jeremy Albers** for setting up our Zoom meeting on the SCC Zoom account.

**Joshua Lawrence**, UCC Hurricane Harvey Disaster Co-Coordinator also, came and shared about the hands on work as followers of Christ that volunteer teams from UCC churches from several states are doing to restore rental housing in Port Arthur and about future work in Beaumont. You can learn quite a bit about the work being done by the video he showed, available online at

<https://vimeo.com/328024789/9ab3c175db>,

and from the webpage, <http://www.ucc.org/disaster-hurricane-harvey-recovery-port-arthur>.

He encouraged us to come, stay for free in volunteer housing, combine people from churches who want to help, and send teams. Our UCC church in Beaumont, Plymouth Congregational, has played a major role in enabling this work to happen. Our host church, St. Paul, responded at our meeting with great generosity by donating all of the lunch offering to support the work in Beaumont/Port Arthur.

Finally, the group present at the meeting gathered again after lunch to hear about the trips people from several churches have made to the Brownsville area to learn and volunteer on the border. We showed two excellent short videos about the work of Angry Tias and Abuelas and Team Brownsville, groups who feed and give needed supplies to those waiting in Matamoros to request asylum in the US. Our group discussed how we might donate supplies to these groups. Contact me at [lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com) if your church is interested. The videos are available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=324880914838080&t=2> and on the Team Brownsville Facebook page.

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

**Personals**  
by Pat Oakes

**G**ail Christeson and John Goff report that both **Cameron** and **Megan** are thriving in their collegiate studies. **Megan** just completed her freshman year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. The curriculum allows lots of exploration - perfect for an artist! **Cameron** just graduated from the University of Texas, Austin with a BS in Biochemistry. Next up, Baylor School of Medicine in Houston, where he'll pursue a dual MD/MPH degree (master of public health)! **Gail**, a member of the UT faculty, enjoyed wearing her academic robes for the occasion.

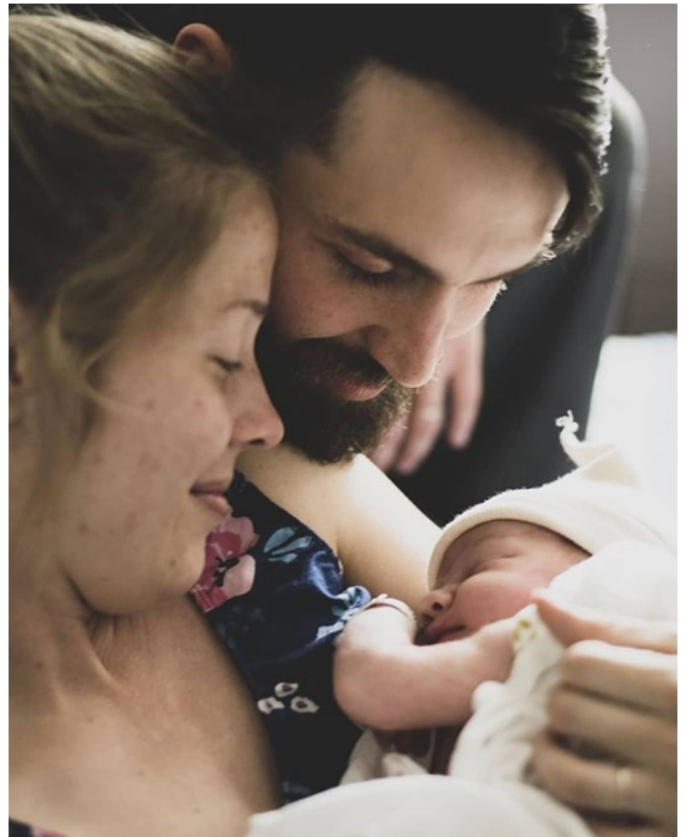
**Liz** and **Reuel Nash** are first-time grandparents—and **Becky** and **Annie** are first-time aunts! **Victoria Claire Garrett Nash Rodgers** was born in Montreal, Canada, at 3:18 a.m. on Saturday May 11, 2019, weighing in at a robust eight pounds, six ounces, and was 21.5 inches long. She will be called **Vivi**. **Ellie** writes, "It's incredible how completely we can love this tiny human we didn't even know three weeks ago. **Mademoiselle Vivi**, you're our everything." **Becky** and **Annie** have already been to meet and to help with their new niece, but **Liz** and **Reuel** have had to wait to visit. They had already scheduled a trip to Europe to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary when they found out that **Ellie** was pregnant with the baby due at a the same time as the trip. They will be headed to Montreal shortly to see **Vivi** and her parents after a brief recuperation time upon their return home.



3/30/19 Megan Goff at the Art Institute of Chicago with some of her wonderful art work



5/25/19 Cameron Goff with his very proud mom Gail Christeson at his graduation from UT Austin



5/11/19 Ellie Nash and her husband Louis Rodgers with their precious new baby girl Vivi

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

**Jonathan Geer** and his husband **Roberto Hernandez** are delighted to report that they are officially beginning the adoption process! They've just filled out a massive tome of paperwork and the next step is to do their "Home Study." Assuming all goes well with that, they'll be in the system and able to be matched with prospective kids/birth mothers. Prayers are definitely appreciated!

In May, **Andrea Low** and her husband **Paul** traveled with Road Scholar to Rome, Florence, and Venice where they toured at a frenetic pace and battled immense crowds. It was **Paul's** first trip to Europe and he was thrilled. **Andrea** enjoyed the art, architecture, and of course, food and wine! They had some time to find little churches and off-the-beaten-track museums that have magnificent works of art, which is always so very rewarding. They also saw a wonderful production of "La Traviata." **Andrea** is already thinking about her next trip in July, 2020—she and her cousin **Leona** will go to various Central European cities and end in Oberammergau to see the Passion Play.



5/23/19 Andrea Low and her husband Paul at St. Mark's in Venice

Congratulations to **Giovanni Fracasso**, grandson of **Fran** and **Rambie Briggs** and son of **Serenity Owens** (formerly **Paula Briggs Fracasso**) and **Michael Fracasso** who graduated magna cum laude from Westlake High School on May 30. **Giovanni** will be going to the University of Denver in the fall.



5/30/19 Giovanni Fracasso, graduate of Westlake High School

**Warinda Harris** won the "Hamilton" ticket lottery and was thrilled to attend the closing night performance in San Antonio. Her mom **Barbara** was excited to go but became ill on show day, so **Warinda's** best friend **Stephanie Land** shared in the experience. Imagine their surprise and delight to discover their seats were front row, center!!

**Kristen Parkhill** had a wonderful time celebrating her mother **Debby Kohrt's** upcoming milestone birthday as well as their very special mother/daughter bond. This was a dream fulfilled for her mother, who has always wanted to visit Hawaii. She is turning 70 in October and she sure showed **Kristen** just how awesome 70 can be. They vacationed on two islands, Waikiki in Oahu, and Lahaina in Maui. They went ziplining, snuba diving (snuba is snorkeling with a tether to one main tank which is in a raft on the water's surface, rather than carrying gear on your back), took a breathtaking helicopter tour, and had a very moving visit to Pearl Harbor.

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## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

They were gone for ten days. **Jason's** mom, **Becky** came from Boston to help with the kids (**Caleb** and **Zooney**), and his dad **Trent** also came for a shorter visit. Knowing that **Jason** had help with the kids was so comforting to **Kristen** which enabled her to truly enjoy their vacation!



5/28/19 Debby Kohrt and daughter Kristen Parkhill had a great time zip lining in Maui, Hawaii



5/29/19 Kristen Parkhill and her mom Debby Kohrt at sunset the island of Maui

**Harrison Tucker** was co-lead in a play put on by the 8th grade class at St Francis. He played Romeo in the play "Shakespeare's Inferno." The story merged Shakespeare characters and Dante's "Inferno." In this comedy, Shakespeare characters experienced different levels of hell based on their "sin." In this amusing story, each tries to work his or her way out of hell.



5/16/19 Romeo (Harrison Tucker) stands beside Juliet, played by Danielle Todd-Harris.

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

**Debby Kohrt** reports that Smiles International (<http://www.smilesinternationalfoundation.org>) had another great mission to Cabo San Lucas. They were very busy correcting craniofacial problems on young children which limited their time for pictures, although they did get their traditional group picture. They will have another mission the end of October.



4/2019 Our own Smiles International nurse, Debby Kohrt—2nd from the left, front row

**Beth Gleason** and her good buddies, **Greg Futch** and **Jaime Hadley**, were at the outdoor Red Rocks Amphitheater in Morrison, CO, at the **Bela Fleck** concert on May 30 and it poured down rain. In spite of the inclement weather, they were loving every minute of it!



5/30/19 Greg Futch, Jaime Hadley, and Beth Gleason loved the Bela Fleck concert they attended at Red Rocks Amphitheater—in spite of the rain.

It is hard to believe that **Nodie** and **Dennis Murphy** have not seen their youngest granddaughter yet. Son **Ned**, daughter-in-law **Faye**, big brother **James** (3 1/2) and baby **Adalyn** live in Spring Lake Park, MN, a Minneapolis suburb. **Ned** is back in school and is working on his prerequisites for entering physical therapy school. **Faye** is a nurse, so they both are very busy! **Nodie** and **Dennis** were all set to go for a visit at spring break when **Nodie's** mother died suddenly in New Orleans. Of course, their plans changed immediately. **Ned** was able to come to New Orleans for his grandmother's service, but there was no time to work in their planned visit to Minnesota. **Nodie** and **Dennis** are hoping to try again when **Ned** has his summer school break in **August**. They do, however, have pictures of adorable **Adalyn**, stretched out on a beautiful quilt which **Nodie** made just for her.

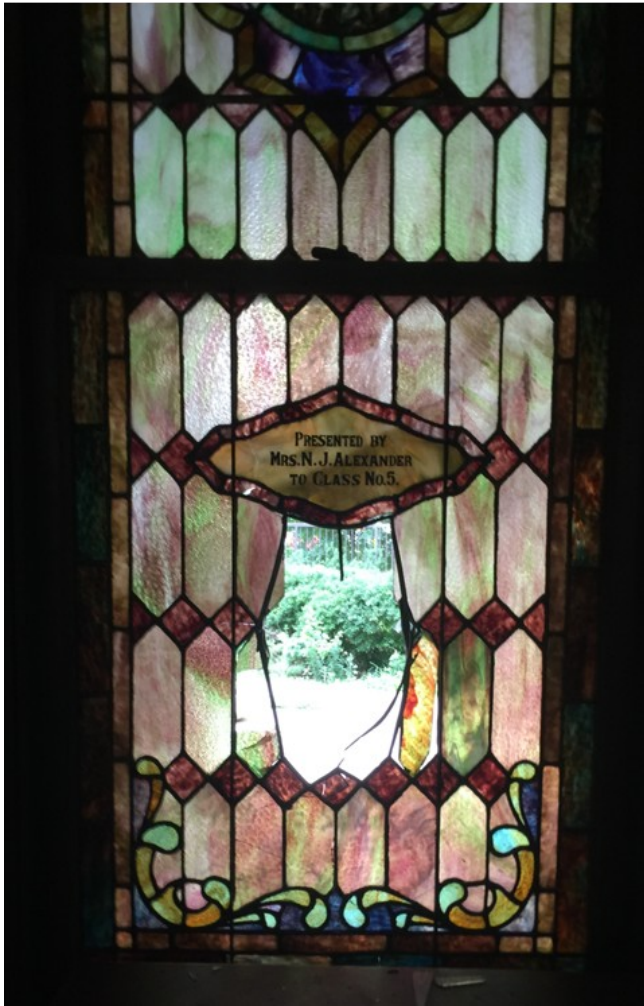


5/2019 Precious 25 week old Adalyn Quinn Murphy poses on the beautiful quilt her grandmother Nodie made just for her

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

There was a distressing incident at the church on May 30 at 2:30 a.m. The police notified the church that a window had been broken on the porch. They were in the area having been notified that there was a potential suicide nearby. No one was apprehended. Our wonderful office administrator **Donna Cravens** took pictures of the damage when she arrived that morning and notified our fabulous fixer-upper **Andy Dierksen** who came and boarded up the window. The broken window was one of the few not protected by plexiglas. The window is one of the original windows which came from the first church building at 9th and Colorado.



5/30/19 The window broken from inside the Fellowship Hall vantage point

**Mel and Pat Oakes** had a wonderful time at their granddaughter **Emily's** graduation from West High School in Iowa City on May 24—but there were a few complications. As they were gathering at the University of Iowa Arena for family photos about 6:15 p.m., tornado sirens went off—and continued to sound insistently for about an hour. Everyone had to take shelter inside and eventually go into the underground tunnels. There were at least 1500 folks taking shelter (a class of 440 and families)—it was all very orderly and no one panicked. It was quite the adventure for **Pat** to navigate all of the stairs! Tornadoes touched down within ten miles, but there was no damage. The ceremony started an hour late—no “Pomp and Circumstance”—just a few measures by the school orchestra as the graduates quickly took their seats. Everyone agreed that it was certainly a memorable graduation. Getting home was another issue. Daughter **Sarah** and **Joe** arrived back in D.C. five hours late, daughter **Mardie** arrived in San Francisco six hours late after torrential hail and rain in Denver—and it took 48 hours for **Pat** and **Mel** to get home. Their first flight was canceled after bad weather set in in Chicago, so daughter **Beth** came back to get them at the Cedar Rapids airport giving them an extra night with her family. The next day they finally made it to Chicago hours late—as was their connecting flight to Austin. After two hours on the runway (because of more storms), the flight was delayed until 9 a.m. the following morning. It was past midnight by this time. An angel of mercy (a United ticket agent at an empty gate), took pity on **Pat** and **Mel**, marched off somewhere, and came back about 20 minutes later with vouchers for a room at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare. After a long search for the shuttle station—walking in the rain—they finally arrived at the hotel and got to sleep about 2 a.m. They were up at 5:30 to get back to the airport. The 9 a.m. flight was on time and they were home in Austin by 1 p.m. It was worth every minute of it to see all their family (except grandson **Durham**) and to see **Emily** graduate with highest honors—1 of 24 out of her class who graduated with a 4.0 average. **Emily** is looking forward to going to Smith College in Northampton, MA, in the fall.

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

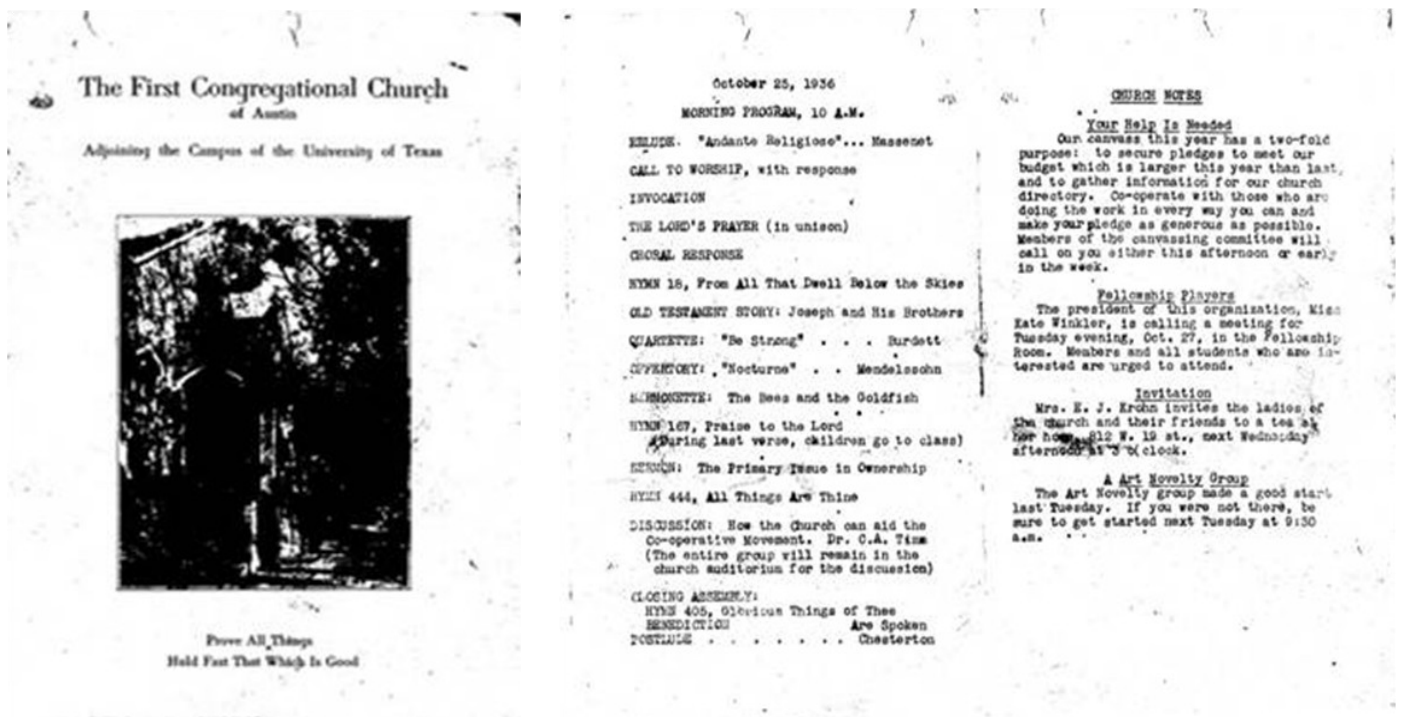


5/24/19 Taken while the tornado sirens were going off, l-r, Mardie Oakes, Pat and Mel Oakes, Sarah Oakes, Eugene Buck, Joe Pierce (Sarah's husband), stellar graduate Emily Buck, Beth Oakes, Ethan Buck, and Eugene's sister Liz Buck

## History Corner

We haven't seen much of **Van Herd** recently. **Van** says, "The last few months, ecclesiastically speaking, I have been working down at UBC, helping the staff and interim pastor there as they are going through this transitional, interim period. Am hoping to be able to get back to CCA sometime before too long." He may not have been with us on Sundays, but he did help our church history studies. Van did not know this, but on the evening of April 15, a vandal gained access to the 2nd floor of the education wing and wreaked havoc on those three rooms, including throwing archives off of the fire escape into the area by the parking lot behind the church. By sheer coincidence, **Van** found the bulletin below. He says, "I was walking to campus along 24th the other morning several weeks ago [I live on San Gabriel now] after that really fierce electrical storm we had, and found this CCA bulletin from 1936 lying out on the sidewalk in front of Skyloft Apts! I don't know where it had blown from. Might it have been caught in a wall or tree all these years, or did it blow out of the church archives? Anyway, I picked it up and let it dry." Thanks, **Van**! It is most distressing to think of all that was lost—even though volunteers from the church came and rescued as much as they could—and cleaned up the mess the miscreant left behind. Office administrator **Donna Cravens** picked up anything that landed out in the yard and moved it to the porch area, then **Tom** came that evening and moved it all indoors. Then over the next few days before Sunday services **Keith Beresheim** and **Darcy Grostick**, the **Dietzes** and **Bethany Leach** and her kids along with **Amy Rivera** came in and sorted through everything so it could be returned to the appropriate places.

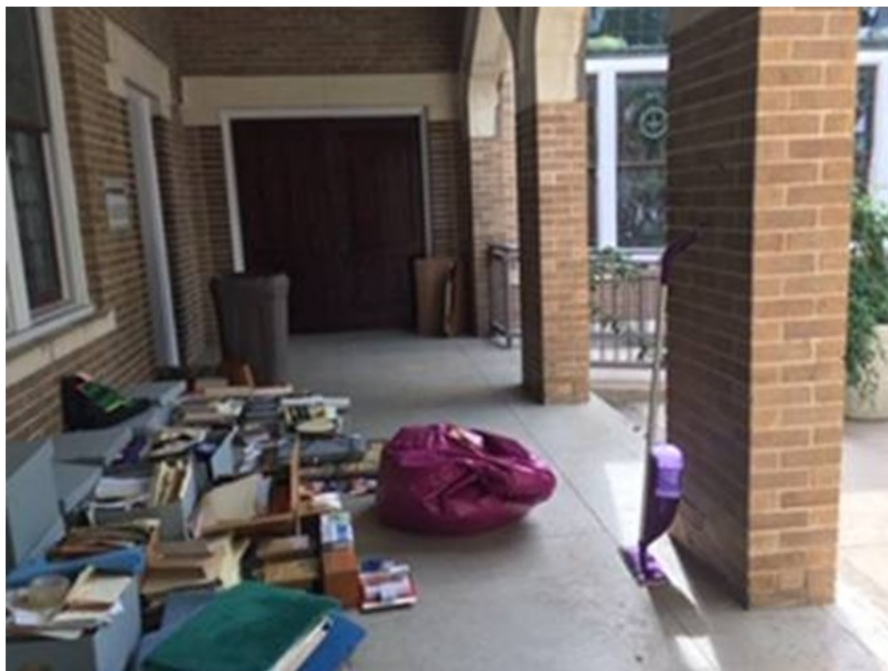
Rev. Marcus Houge was the pastor in 1936. You can find out more about him at our church history Web site. <https://chi-node30.websitehostserver.net/~patandme/CCAHistory/MarcusHogue.html>



10/25/36 The Sunday bulletin found by Van Herd. What once was lost now is found. Amazing grace!

Photos cont. on next page

## History Corner, cont.



4/15/19 What once was lost, now is found—vandalized items on the porch

### **JUNE'S GUESS WHO CHALLENGE PHOTOS**

There are two photos for you to make your guesses this month. There are three folks for you to guess—two from the class photo. You must be specific in your guesses for the class photo. Hint--All three are regular attendees at church. Good luck! If you have any ideas, send me a note at [oakes@utexas.edu](mailto:oakes@utexas.edu).



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History Corner, cont.

ANOTHER JUNE'S GUESS WHO CHALLENGE PHOTO

