

Our 2006 Lenten journey has begun.

The roots of Lent are varied. We can trace one root back to the early church's practice of fasting on Good Friday as a way of observing Jesus' death on the cross. In time, the Good Friday fast was extended back one day to include Maundy Thursday, and then even further back to include all of Holy Week.

We can trace another root back to the early church's practice of preparing converts for baptism into the church. This period of preparation, which included three to six weeks of intensive ethical, spiritual, and theological training, culminated with the baptism of the initiates on Easter morning. However, as the church moved in the direction of baptizing infants, this period of preparation for adults grew increasingly unnecessary.

From these two roots, the liturgical season of Lent emerged as a six-week period of reflection on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, his journey to Jerusalem, his passion on the cross, and his call to his disciples to pick up their cross.

Today, Lent is often associated with the spiritual discipline of self-denial. We have all heard the phrase, "I have given up so-and-so for Lent," the so-and-so often being an indulgence like dark chocolate, potato chips, or Belgian Ale. The intent of this sacrificial act is to heighten the Lenten pilgrim's awareness of Jesus' victory over temptation and his suffering on behalf of others.

On my recent trip to New Orleans, I took pause to ponder those who had everything *taken away* from them—possessions, homes, jobs, neighborhoods, anticipated futures, family members. It is one thing to choose one's sacrifice, and quite another to have everything taken from you against your will. One thing to say, "forty days and I can pop the cork on a Chimay again," and quite another to ask, "what do I do now that I've lost everything?" One thing to decide what, when, and how much to give up, and quite another to be completely dependent on those deciding what, when, and how much they will give.

For me, this raises some serious Lenten questions. How can the spiritual discipline of self-denial be truly responsive to the needs of those from whom everything has been taken? Must we take on some personal suffering in order to be agents of salvation to our brothers and sisters in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast? Is there a cross we must bear on their behalf?

Our church has responded with characteristic generosity to the relief efforts. Several of you took the time to drive to the Gulf Coast to offer assistance. Some of you donated money directly to Back Bay Mission. One of you donated a computer to Wil Brown, and one of you some money to his church. I took over \$2,500 worth of Home Depot Gift Cards that you donated to New Orleans. We're now planning a possible work group. After visiting New Orleans myself, I can tell you that your generosity is greatly appreciated.

The United Church of Christ's efforts in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast will be long term. In time, we'll be tempted to move on to something else. We'll have to struggle more than once with compassion fatigue. But hopefully, we'll have prepared ourselves spiritually for these temptations and struggles. Hopefully, we'll continue to be willing and able to give up more than incidental indulgences in order to help others build their lives anew. Hopefully, we'll be willing to bear a cross that will bring new life to others.

OUTREACH ALERT FOR MARCH, 2006

Mt. Bonnell Cleanup

Our next Mt. Bonnell cleanup will be Saturday, April 8 (a week before Easter). We are coordinating this with the "Greater Austin Cleanup" day, and we may get some publicity. Please put it on your calendar.

T-shirts: soon!!

There are probably many of you who are wondering: what every happened to the new t-shirts?? Believe it or not, we are making progress, albeit slowly. We have purchased all the shirts (more than 100) and have washed them, and Reuel Nash has completed his cutting of the silk screens. We are now trying to find a weekend for our silk screening party at the Nashes, but scheduling (crop walk, spring break, etc.) is pushing it back. We hope to have shirts available in time for the April 8 Mt. Bonnell clean-up. Please note that we were unable to get any "sweat free tees" in sizes smaller than child's small or larger than XXL. If you would like a T-shirt in a toddler size or XXXL, please purchase a blank one yourself, give it to John Goff and we'll screen it free of charge.

Micah 6 Volunteers needed

The Micah 6 food pantry is looking for folks to pick up perishables. If you are interested, please contact Robin Chapman or Tommie Pinkard.

TRUSTEES ACTIVITIES FOR MARCH

- 1) The Trustees will form an audit committee and determine procedures and policies for regular financial audits. We seek assistance from any members with experience in this area!
- 2) Trinity Builders will complete repairs to termite-damaged flooring and other woodwork in Fellowship Hall and the stairway.
- 3) Lincoln Binford will take-over the position of "Building and Grounds Committee".

Chairs of our Boards

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|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Trustees: | Reuel Nash |
| Deacons: | Betty Bodman |
| Christian Education: | Nancy Edison & Doyal Pinkard |
| Christian Outreach: | John Goff |

Spring Retreat Date Set -- Mark Your Calendars

Join us at Slumber Falls Friday Camp near New Braunfels April 28-Sunday April 30. Carla Cheatham, a Houston seminarian and soon-to-be pastor will lead the adults in a study to discern our spiritual gifts. Planning is underway for children's and youth activities. If you have questions or ideas, or just want to help, contact Marilyn Vache.

We still need Sunday School assistants for the elementary Sunday School class. Please sign up and join the fun!!!

FREEZE NIGHT MINISTERS FOR MARCH

- 1 Wed Tom/Robin, Dennis Murphy, Chester Rosson
- 4 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Cecile Adam
- 6 Mon John Goff, Ben White, Sara Ross
- 8 Wed Tom/Robin, Ben White
- 11 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach
- 12 Sun Tom/Robin, Ben White, Cecile Adam
- 13 Mon John Goff, Matt Blackstock, Sara Ross
- 15 Wed Tom/Robin, Dennis Murphy, Chester Rosson
- 18 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Jennifer Howicz
- 20 Mon John Goff, Ben White, Sara Ross
- 22 Wed Tom/Robin, Doyal & Tommie
- 25 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Cecile Adam
- 26 Sun Tom/Robin, Reuel & Ellie Nash
- 27 Mon John Goff, Matt Blackstock, Sara Ross
- 29 Wed Tom/Robin, Dennis Murphy, Chester Rosson

PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

A big thank you from **Emily Howicz** for all who bought Girl Scout cookies during coffee hour at church. Thanks to your generosity, she was one of her troop's top sellers and earned her way to Girl Scout camp! In February, Emily won first place in the Rising Star competition for Fourth Grade poetry at her school. Her piece, about the first time she held her sister Tess, will now go to the state competition. Whether she wins or not, she'll get to go to a ceremony in May honoring the Rising Star authors and shake hands with one of her favorite authors, Pam Muñoz Ryan, who wrote ESPERANZA RISING. Good work, Emily! Younger sister Tess, who is being treated for scoliosis, did really well with her last cast - it lasted 3 whole months (compared to 6 weeks with the old casts)! With the "new" design (new in America), she had no lung complications or skin sores, and only asked to have it taken off once during the whole time. In fact, she actually seemed more comfortable in it than she has been out. She is taking a temporary break from the cast until after spring break, and will go into a new one.

Michael and Kerry Adams are looking forward to becoming grandparents in August. Their son Jamie and his wife Lauren are expecting. Lauren heard the fetal heart tones and the rate is one sixty, which every old wife Michael ever knew said meant a boy. We'll see. Kerry started back at IRS on the thirtieth of January, and the family is adjusting. Julia is out of school at noon on Fridays, so Michael is taking Fridays off, which enables him to work on the house to get it

ready to sell. They want to move to the country and have a house and yard with room for a pony. Jamie's friend William gave Michael an old car to drive until they could repair their better ones. It threw a rod the first day Kerry was at work, but they are managing, with buses and whatnot.

Clark Hubb's last chemotherapy was Feb, 20-22. Then look out, world! Clark's pawing the earth at the starting gate! He is more than ready to get back to normal!

Rizer Everett has some book recommendations for us. THE SECRET OF WATER by Masaree Emoto is filled with excellent photographs of hundreds of water crystals of various shapes, and he defends his belief that words and thoughts of people have consequences on the world around us. OUR ENDANGERED VALUES by Jimmy Carter, Rizer thinks, it should be required reading for our nation's leaders. Rizer is continuing with his chess instruction with young Henry Householder. He has been involved in several LAMP (Learning Activities for Mature People) programs this month. One speaker said that there are two important factors about politics in Texas--"the first is money, and I've forgotten what the other factor is." Another LAMP speaker lectured on the Manhattan Project. He had a visit from his son John and his wife Barbara which included eating out at several special places--the 1886 Room at the Driskill Hotel here in Austin and then lunch at the Menger Hotel in San Antonio followed by two interesting hours at the Wild Animal Park near New Braunfels. In late January his daughter, Dot, arrived for an enjoyable four day visit which included a visit with Rizer's brother, Charles, and his wife when they had a fine lunch at Carmelo's Restaurant. Unfortunately, in addition to the great books, gallivanting and visits, Rizer has been seeing a variety of doctors. They are trying to determine the best way to treat Rizer's spinal troubles. His friend Doris Tyler was his driver when he had a steroid injected into his spine in mid-February. He reports that he is now able to walk around his cottage without using his cane, so he is hoping that the steroid injection is doing the proper job of improving his walking ability.

Wilmer Brown reports,"I always look forward to receiving mail from you and especially news of what's happening at Congregational Church. Here is a little news about Hulen and me. Our address has changed to 541 Octavia Street, New Orleans, LA 70115. Our new phone number is: (504) 894-8460. I also have a new e-mail address. wilmerbrown@bellsouth.net. Hulen's e-mail will remain the same until further notice. There are a few members who have returned to New Orleans and we are really challenged to look for new ways of being in ministry with each other. Nevertheless, we are worshipping with St. Matthew UCC, blending the two traditions and races in a way that has never been done in New Orleans in the UCC. Fred Meade, pastor of St. Matthew's, and I serve as co-pastors to the two congregations and it is truly a good experience. Fred and I pray that we can continue in this manner and not return to the separate locations with two small communities, but that we can continue being one community and maximize our potential as witnesses of the way we believe God intended the church and what we might be able to accomplish in our ministry in New Orleans."

Over the last two years, **Paul and Ellen Deisler** have thought that they needed to move out of their house and into a retirement community sooner or later. In September of 2005, they decided that, the waiting times being so long for suitable apartments in life-care communities they liked, they would see about moving into something as soon as possible in another type of community. This would get the squeezing down of possessions over with while they were able to accomplish it and, if desirable, a second move would then be easier. Late in October they visited the last community on their list, the Heritage at Gaines Ranch, and quickly saw that it was what they wanted. One apartment was available right then, big enough for them, so they put down the deposit and began the job of planning, sorting, eliminating, and so forth. During the sometimes painful process of squeezing down from a 3,800 square foot house to a 925 square foot apartment, they twice filled up a commercial sized dumpster (14 ft. long, 8 ft wide, 6 ft high) that sat for over two months in their driveway, with stuff going back decades. The rest they divvied up between their kids, their neighbors, their new apartment, charity and a rented storage locker (for those items they could not part with immediately). Getting rid of most of 110 cases of books (keeping the ones most cherished -- five book cases full) was easier than they thought: everyone wanted them. The logistics of getting all of this stuff to its various destinations, both in and out of Austin, was complicated, but, finally, on January 18, 2006, it was done and they moved. They are still sorting and unpacking, but they have reached the stage where they are comfortable and the Heritage has so far proven to be very good. It may be that Paul and Ellen will stay permanently: at least they now have options. Their house was placed on the market on a Friday in January and buyers made an acceptable offer that Sunday. Closing was to be on February 21 and, assuming that went as planned, the move is complete. It was hard leaving a house they had designed and built and lived in happily for 11 years, but both Paul and Ellen know it was, for them, the right decision. In the meantime they are meeting some very interesting new people as they get used to a new way of life.

Lois and John Drachenberg have had a challenging 2006 so far. Happily, both of them are doing better (even though Lois spent several days in the hospital at Smithville Regional after she passed out as a result of an allergic reaction to some perfume someone was wearing at a restaurant where they were eating). On Lincoln's birthday, however, they weren't sick. They went to the 100th birthday celebration of St. Peter's UCC in Coupland. They were very impressed with the wonderful restoration that has been done to the old building (much of it done by an eighty-five year-old man) and were delighted to see and hear Ernie Dean who preached for the great occasion.

Joe McMillan has been much missed at church these past few months. He has been struggling with dermatitis, but is finally feeling better. Joe points out that in the effort to find out what was causing his discomfort, they tested for and eliminated all kinds of dire things and he is really very healthy! Nodie Murphy has really missed Joe and Lois and John in the choir--as have we all.

After **John Alford's** sister Ella died on December 3, John started to have more health problems. By mid-December it was determined that he could not

use the stairs safely at home. He moved in to the Heritage Gaines Ranch and into an independent living apartment with 24/7 care-givers. He was enjoying his apartment and Frances spent a good amount of time there sharing meals (Including dinner with the Deislars one evening) and spending the night. In early February, he was hospitalized at the Austin Heart Hospital with congestive heart failure. He stayed five days and then was transferred to a rehabilitation facility where he continued to get weaker. In mid-February he was taken by ambulance back to the Heart Hospital for pneumonia and another congestive heart failure episode. On the 14th when he was discharged, Frances was desperately trying to find a place for John to go that would be safe and meet his needs. After one night here at the house, he was able to move back into Heritage Gaines Ranch with his own well loved care-givers. At this writing he was sleeping a great deal and had little interest in the activities around him. Frances and family members were continuing to investigate rehabilitation options for him. Please keep John and Frances in your prayers.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 4 Jillian Tomasek
- 9 Debbie Herst
- 11 Alex VandeStadt
- 12 Jennifer Howicz
- 14 Lisa Leaf
Margit Frances Briggs
- 15 Clark Hubbs
Mary Sinclair
- 17 Lori Gooding
- 22 Kristin Galle Hampton
John Drachenberg
- 23 John Herst
- 26 John Towery
- 27 Mary Herst
- 28 David Rossiter

COFFEE HOUR

Please sign up in the Fellowship Room to be coffee hour hosts on an upcoming Sunday. The coffee hour time is such a good opportunity to visit old friends and meet visitors. We keep coffee and ginger ale and some punch fixings in the pantry in the kitchen. There are usually paper napkins, and we use coffee mugs and punch cups to avoid wasting natural resources. Your menu can be as simple or complicated as you want. Cookies and/or chips and salsa are just fine! If you have questions, talk to Pat Oakes, Tommie Pinkard, or Lynne Lemley.

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

A biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal exploration of Jesus' identity, and our relationship to him.

This spring, Whit Bodman and Tom VandeStadt are offering an adult education series that explores the identity of Jesus from biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal perspectives. The goal is to help folks in our church understand Christianity's interpretations and understandings of Jesus in different times and places, and to help us clarify and articulate our own relationship to Jesus. Whit and Tom are participating in a preaching series, and then hosting a bi-weekly discussion group from February to April.

The series is divided into six main topics: Jesus as *King of Kings*, Jesus as *prophet*, Jesus as *savior*, Jesus as *suffering servant*, Jesus as *God*, and Jesus' question: "who do *you* say that I am?" After exploring the themes that coalesce around Jesus' various titles, folks will be encouraged to write a statement that articulates their own faith in Jesus.

Whit and Tom are taking turns preaching on these themes. The lessons they'll be preaching on and the dates for the after worship discussions in March and April are as follows:

March 5, Jesus as savior, Tom preaches, After Worship Forum

Romans 5: 12-21

Matthew 11: 2-6

March 12, Jesus as savior, Whit preaches

Psalms 120

John 3:11-21

March 19, Jesus as suffering servant, Whit preaches, After Worship Forum

Hosea 1:1-11

Heb. 5:1-10

March 26, Jesus as suffering servant, Tom preaches

Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12

Luke 9: 18-22

April 2, Jesus as God, Whit preaching, After Worship Forum

Ps 82

Heb. 1:1-9

April 9, Jesus as God, Palm Sunday, Tom preaches

Colossians 1: 13-20

John 1: 1-14 or I John 1: 1-4

Plus a palm procession text from one of the gospels

ADDRESS CHANGES

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HOPE AWARDS

Each year the Austin Area Interreligious Ministries (AAIM) grants Hope Awards to individuals or organizations who best exemplify our mission of bringing healing and hope to our community. This year, we are proud to give our Hope award to various segments of the faith community who responded in powerful and extraordinary ways to meet the needs of the Hurricane Evacuees who came to Austin.

When a city faces trials and tribulations, there is always a choice of how to respond. In Austin, the horrific disaster had the unlikely result of establishing cooperation between secular and sacred institutions as well as east and west side religious communities. Immediately following the crisis, it became apparent how vital the faith community is to our ability to respond in times of disaster. Thanks to the continued tireless work of the Hope Awardees, the city has had vital partners as we transition from immediate crisis management to long-term recovery. Because several individuals and organizations responded to the crisis with dignity, diligence and of course HOPE, we have a larger number of Hope Award recipients than usual.

Come out to show your support to our faith community at AAIM's Annual Hope Award Celebration, on April 18, 2006, at St. David's Episcopal Church. For more information about AAIM's Annual Hope Award Celebration, please call 386-9145 ext18.

**DEADLINE FOR APRIL VISITOR ~
MARCH 17**