

# THE VISITOR

March 2019

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

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



## Casting our Prayer Net as Disciples

**M**y favorite ritual we celebrate in our congregation is our prayer net. After sharing in the meal each first Sunday of the month, **Pastor Tom** invites us to tie a ribbon on our prayer net. We have a physical symbol of our joys and concerns that we lift to God. But more than just the many colors that represent a prayer from young and old in our congregation, we have a symbolic reminder that the first disciples called by Jesus were fishermen. He called them from their fishing nets and said he would make them fishers of people - marking them as disciples. (Matthew 4:18-22)

Each time we tie a ribbon we cast our silent prayers up to God and embody the spirit of the disciples. When we just can't find the words, we know that Spirit of creation understands the prayers in our hearts and "...that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." (Romans 8:26) This is especially powerful for the children of our congregation as well. They see that even if they do not know how to pray, their deeply held emotions have a place in our discipleship and are celebrated as much as the adults.

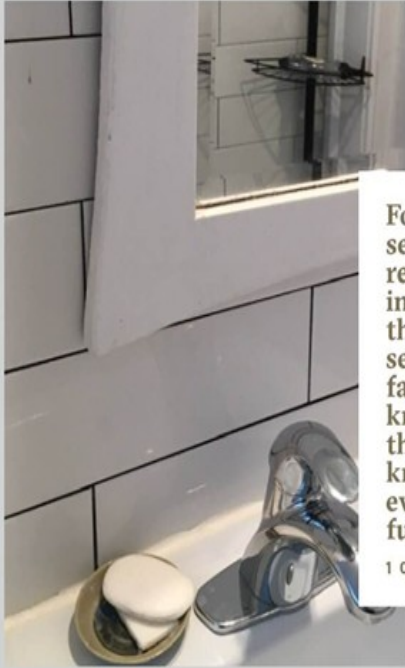
The prayer net was brought to us by **Rev. Jo Jensen** almost ten years ago. She recognized the power of seeing the many colors of ribbon tied together in one creation - just as we are tied to each other in this church, as disciples in the world, and children of God. We use different colors during different times of the year to celebrate the liturgical calendar. Jo says, "The ribbons are like seeing the many faces of God all woven together as one embodiment."

The interconnections of the net remind us that we are all one in God's creation with different colors, different experiences, and gifts. This powerful symbol is one we have all created over a long period of time and represents our prayers of the past, our prayers for the future, and serves as a reminder that we are not alone in our prayers. There is always another ribbon and another disciple to be a witness to your love, sorrow, and hope in your life journey. We might not always have our altar front and center, but our prayer net is our ever-present reminder that we are all one in the many faces of God.

Next time you're in the sanctuary, I invite you to reflect on the deep symbolism of the prayer net and how it makes you feel to have your prayers be a part of this disciples' net we cast into the world.

**Rene Slataper** is a member of the Congregational Church of Austin, UCC, a student at Lexington Theological Seminary, and currently discerning his call to ministry.

By **Rene Slataper**



For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 COR 13:12

This recently remodeled and beautiful bathroom is where every street youth client sees themselves. We have two bathrooms now that we can be proud of thanks to our landlord. May every client see their reflection through God's eyes, already holy and complete.

Want to help more? Bring a gallon of milk labeled SYM for the fridge on a Sunday. Or sign up to be on our prayer team: <http://www.streetyouthministry.org/engage>. Each month we love prayer team members due to email church. Help us restore our most important team!

## April Visitor Deadline March 25, 2019

### Church Leadership

Trustee Chair  
Deacons Chair  
Outreach Team  
Moderator  
Treasurer  
Financial Secretary  
Christian Education Coordinators  
  
Youth Sunday School  
Clerk  
Historians  
Webmaster  
Member-At-Large

Keith Beresheim  
Barbara Burnham  
Whit Bodman  
John Goff  
Gail Christeson  
Dennis Murphy  
Bethany Leach  
Shaela Rutherford  
Amy Kent Rivera  
Jaime Hadley  
Pat & Mel Oakes  
Mel Oakes  
Bill Beardall

**Heart of Texas Association News**  
**March**  
**by Liz Nash**

**E**very other month, several of our Heart of Texas ministers gather at St. John's UCC in Burton for "Jam and Bread." Our ministers have been doing this for years, well before I began serving as the Brazos Association Minister in 2006. In 2015, the Brazos and South Texas Associations merged to form the Heart of Texas Association, and our Jam and Bread group has been enriched by a carload from New Braunfels ever since. The group spends most of the time going around the table sharing from our personal lives and about the lives of our churches, ending with a program that is a discussion or presentation on a topic. The programs have ranged from sharing with Filipino ministers visiting the US for a meeting at Slumber Falls Camp to goodbye reflections for ministers who are leaving or retiring to discussions of skills and practices related to ministry to how to give through KIVA -- and many other topics over the years. After the sharing and program are done, the group goes to lunch together and continues having fellowship.

The Jam and Bread programs are often filled with thoughtful discussion and helpful information. However, the most important part of the morning is the sharing. Good ministry thrives on time with trusted colleagues, where ministers can have a sanctuary to share highs and lows. Ministry is supported when pastors and chaplains can have friends who know the work and be a confidential sounding board for ideas, joys, and struggles. In the UCC, the glue that holds our church together and binds us in our walk in faith is covenant. To keep faithful covenant among us, we need to find time and space to be together and support one another. An important part of that covenant is for

our ministers to spend time together to lift each other up as often as possible -- a challenge with our long distances.

Our pastors also had a marvelous opportunity recently to be enriched and spend good time together at the annual South Central Conference Clergy Retreat at Slumber Falls Camp in early February. Once again, this was a time to support each other and be enriched. The program was led by **Ron Buford**, the UCC "Still Speaking" campaign leader who is now a local church pastor -- a gracious, warm-hearted, and articulate man. He led us in a 12 step way of examining racism and other tendencies to judge people by their outer traits. Most of our local church pastors were there to benefit from **Ron's** "food for the spirit," his challenges to us, our worship together, and our time of building community.

The ministries of all of our churches are strengthened when our pastors have strong and healthy collegial relationships. I encourage all of us to understand and support our ministers as they take time to spend with others, whether it is in a local lectionary Bible study group (to share about the week's scriptures), Jam and Bread, and/or another intentional group. I also hope you will support our ministers in maintaining their covenantal ties to the wider UCC. As we need the community of our church, our ministers need each other. When they can have that support and encouragement, the ministry of all of our churches will be enriched.

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

## Personals by Pat Oakes

**L**iz Nash had a very productive trip to El Salvador in late January and early February. She reports, "I flew into San Salvador on Saturday, January 26. Those of us who flew in that day went straight up to Alegría, which is about two hours northeast of the airport, met most of the rest of our group, and settled in at the hostel we always stay in, run by **Roberto** and **Fanie** - who welcomed us 'home' to see their kids a year older and to see a number of folks we have come to know and deeply appreciate over the years. Our group is made up of UCC people from churches in Wisconsin, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Texas. This time, we enjoyed the bustle of people visiting and all the market activity over the weekend in Alegría, much of it in the square right outside where we stay, as Alegría is something of a weekend destination with its wonderful view from its location on the side of an extinct volcano. During the week, we worked with the community **Oscar** works with to help build greenhouses and get plants going on a plot of land just below the town that Alegría has made available for groups in the community. The idea is to provide paid work for several people doing the planting, building, and selling, with the unsold food going to the community. Some planted tomatoes and other things in greenhouses built with metal poles sunk in concrete with a very fine net over them. I worked with the group putting in the posts for a very large greenhouse, covered later in the week by a huge net that keeps most animals out -- like a very large tent. The big greenhouse is for ornamental plants and (coming a little later) small fruit trees. The folks there had made baskets for the ornamentals out of wire -- on the last day or so, we helped put plastic bags in the inside of the baskets to hold organic material from the woods that they had brought in a big pile, then replanted seedlings that they had planted in cups. We hung those on the thick cables that were strung between the poles. The ladies there were better at these improvised baskets than we were. They know how to put things together with what they have. We also took a bunch of school supplies - mostly what I brought -- to the San Juan I school by the lake in the volcano crater there, along with healthy sandwiches for a good lunch for all the kids that we buy in Berlin, a nearby town.

**Oscar** thought it best to go to San Juan I because many of the kids in the very poor San Juan I and II communities are now going to that school and it has never had a donation. That day, the principal gave us a very good and specific list from the principal of supplies the teachers could use. **Oscar** and **Tito**, one of the people who works with us from the Alegría alcalde's (mayor's) office, took me to the nearby town of Santiago de Maria, and I bought almost all of them in a pharmacy that **Tito** knew had a bunch of things. It took quite a while as they have to count and write everything on receipts by hand. But it was great. **Oscar** said we probably supplied them for the rest of the year :) The generosity of our church really helped with this gift because I had plenty of money for school supplies this time. We also learned that two young people from families they and **Joan** and **Tom Neilsen**, who organize these trips and have known for many years, are in the current migrant caravan. A third person is already here. **Joan** was wondering how to get their phone number to these ones who are making the long journey. We have no idea if that would help, but it makes the situation of people coming up even more urgent for all of us -- and makes us even more angry about the treatment of these people that belittles their dignity and humanity."



2/2019 Liz Nash (center in orange) with her co-workers  
In El Salvador

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## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



2/19 The greenhouse area being constructed by folks who volunteered in Alegria



2/19 Volunteer gardeners in Alegria

**Nancy Brown** celebrated her 99th birthday in great style on Feb. 16 at a luncheon at Pappadeaux's surrounded by dear friends and her Delta Sigma Theta sorority sisters from Huston-Tillotson. A good time was had by all as hosts **Catherine** and **Bob Lee** queried the group on things like **Nancy's** favorite color (purple), favorite kind of music (classical) and how much a one pound loaf of bread cost in 1920 (12 cents).



2/16/19 Anita Swain, Nancy Brown, the birthday queen, looking at pictures of Sharon Brown's grandchildren, and Bobbie Duren

**Bill** and **Betty Phillips** and daughters **Stephanie** and **Katy** have had a daunting two months or more. **Bill** and **Betty** and daughter **Katy** drove in from Creedmoor where they live on a small farm where **Katy** has horses and other critters (in rural Travis County, pop. 218) to attend the Christmas candlelight carol service on December 16--looking good. Just a few days later **Bill** suffered a fall and was in the hospital for ten days and then in a rehab facility for three weeks (he is still recuperating). Daughter **Stephanie** came to and fro from San Marcos to help out once **Bill** came home. In late January, Shiner, **Katy's** chihuahua was bitten by a rattlesnake. Thanks to emergency treatment, a good vet, and lots of dollars, Shiner pulled through. As if that weren't enough, in early February **Katy** decided to prune some roses on the property some way from the house. When she reached down to clear some underbrush, she felt a sting on her right arm and hand—and then saw a huge rattlesnake! After an extended wait (more than 30 minutes) for an ambulance to arrive, feisty **Katy** walked down the long drive (for some reason, the ambulance would not go on the drive) and went to the ICU at Seton in Kyle where she was for two nights and two 1/2 days receiving two bags of antivenin. **Katy** had only been home from the hospital for about an hour when she went to the back of a closet in the house where she pulled out a loaded .22 rifle which had been left by the previous owner, marched out to the rose garden, carefully looked around, found the rattlesnake, shot it in the head, counted the 8 rattles, and marched back to the house.



Katy Phillips

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## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

She certainly took the whole episode personally! She was in a lot of pain for several days with a swollen arm and hand and missed a week of work where she is the director of public works in Sunset Valley. **Katy**, the cellist with our trio years ago, reports that she is going to be fine, although she found the combination of venom, antivenin and opioids to be a bit overwhelming. An additional note—her sister **Stephanie**, a free-lance violist and composer, is the new music director at Faith UCC in New Braunfels.

Texas—you've got to love it. We know of two other folks from our small church associated with rattlesnake bites—**Ena Rutherford** who was bitten 2 years ago when she was two while on a visit to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Another was **Zona Galle** who was bitten years ago while on a hike along a remote creek near Liberty Hill. Both were helicoptered to hospitals and have recovered fully.

On Sunday, Feb. 17, the congregation celebrated the upcoming birth of **Baby Boy Zercher** with a shower during coffee hour. **Amelia Fulbright** and **Jonathan Zercher** and their four-year-old daughter **Vivienne** were there to enjoy opening presents and sharing refreshments. **Amelia** turned 41 on the 23rd of Feb.—the due date. The whole family, including **Amelia's** mother were in church on the 24th—and **Amelia** pointed out she was still pregnant—which wasn't really necessary.



2/17/19 Naomi Rutherford and Vivienne Zercher watching her mother Amelia Fulbright cut the baby shower cake. Frances Alford is in the background.

**George Ruben Zercher** was born February 27th at 2:35 p.m., weighing 7.1 pounds and was 20.5 inches long. Amelia's labor lasted around 12 hours or so. She delivered with assistance from, and in the company of, several different midwives. Together, they did impressive work! **Jonathan** was also there. **Vivienne** waited patiently at home with **Ruby** (**Amelia's** mother) during this time. **Ruby** and **Vivienne** met **George** at the birthing center a few hours after his birth. **Vivienne** has been a very proud, very helpful, very excited big sister!



2/27/19 Brand-new George Ruben Zercher



2/28/19 Elated Fulbright/Zercher family—Jonathan, big sister Vivienne, and Amelia holding baby George

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



2/17/19 It was great to see Frances Alford at church not only catching up with old friends but also enjoying the company of her family--l-r--Lynne Lemley, Frances Alford, niece-by-marriage Jessica Attie, nephew Peter Stafford holding their daughter Ruby, and Sara Ross--great-niece Stella was playing in the nursery

Also on the 17th, the congregation was delighted to see **Frances Alford**, a long-time member and master quilter who had the nerve to move to Grafton, Vermont, some years ago! She was visiting her nephew **Peter Stafford**, his wife **Jessica Attie**, and their 2 darling little girls—**Stella** and **Ruby**—who live here in Austin now and have been attending our church regularly.

Intrepid traveler **Nancy Edison** enjoyed three weeks in Guatemala in late January and early February. She went with a Japanese friend from Round Rock whom she met in her tai chi class. They spent the first two weeks in Panajachel located on gorgeous Lake Atitlan at the Jahel Tinamit Spanish School (which **Nancy** highly recommends) where they immersed themselves in learning Spanish. Classes were every morning from 8 a.m. until noon. They stayed in a family home which also included meals. On weekends they toured a few sites in the area—a pottery factory, a weaving institute, and a school. The third week they toured with Caravan Tours and were delighted to see some very interesting Mayan ruins including Quirigua and Tikal. They also went to Antigua where they could see a volcano in the distance, a nunnery, and a coffee plantation. **Nancy** loved the trip and came home with great stories to tell and some gorgeous Guatemalan textiles.

**Debby Kohrt** met her friend **Peggy** in Jamaica for a wedding the weekend of the 17th of February. The bride, **Jen**, is a daughter of their friend **Karla**. Most of the guest were from Wisconsin.....

quite a big destination wedding! The groom is a Milwaukee fire fighter. They all had a wonderful time catching up with old friends and enjoying the amazing weather.



2/16/19 Debby Kohrt (right) and her friend Peggy in Jamaica for the wedding of the daughter of a mutual friend



2/16/19 Debby is in the second row at the right about 7 folks in. Don't you know that all of these folks from Wisconsin were delighted with the sun and surf!

**Victoria Li** had us all much relieved as she recounted during joys and concerns time on Sunday the 24th how she had come within inches of being killed or seriously injured on Friday evening, the 22nd, while on her way to pick up her daughter who was coming in from work in Houston on the Super Charter bus. She was driving east on Lake Austin Blvd. at the intersection with MoPac at about eight o'clock in the evening in unfamiliar territory when, while trying to figure out which lane to use, she did not see the light, went through it, and was hit by a pickup truck going south on the access road. Her airbag deployed and her car spun up onto the sidewalk.

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## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Stunned, **Victoria** felt enveloped by a calm presence, and once she figured out what had happened—the truck hit the driver’s side just at the rear passenger door—she took a mental check of herself and realized that she was just fine. She was immediately surrounded by folks, including the uninjured pickup driver, who were all asking what they could do to help. She was horrified to realize that she had run through the light—having never done that before. She was so grateful no one was hurt. Four police cars arrived shortly and **Victoria** said they couldn’t have been more kind and concerned. She wondered when she woke up the next morning if there would be after-effects of the impact, but there were none. She truly feels blessed and grateful—as are we all. In true “the show must go on” spirit, her husband **Bill Campbell** with additional comments by **Victoria** showed a wonderful, entertaining and informative slide show of their trip to the Holy Land last spring to congregants after the service on the 24th.



5/5/18 Bill Campbell and Victoria Li in a rooftop view of Old Jerusalem with the Dome of the Rock clearly visible, taken from the roof of the Austrian Hospice which provides lodging primarily to people from the countries of the Hapsburg Empire.

**Greg Futch** reports that he has found a church home Arvada United Methodist church in Arvada, CO, a suburb of Denver. He is very glad to have found a progressive Methodist church close to where they live. This church has a large music program, a great children's ministry, and two fine co-pastors. They take a liberal position on most of the divisive issues of the day--LGBT, climate change, and social justice in general--**Greg's** kind of church. They are in the midst of this huge struggle within the denomination to keep from splitting up over welcoming LGBT folks, and it is a sorrowful time for many progressive Methodists, and many other even moderate folks. **Greg** wants **Nodie** to know that he has joined the choir there and is learning to sing tenor with the help of his choir mates. Both **Greg** and **Margaret** are loving being near their son and his wife—and the grandchildren!! **Greg** says hello to all the Congregational crowd in Austin.



2/10/19 Greg Futch, 4th from the left, singing tenor in the choir at Arvada United Methodist Church in Colorado, his new church home

**Beth Placek** continues to recuperate from her terrible encounter with sepsis in late September. She was in ICU for weeks and it was touch and go for some time. On Feb. 25th, she had a heart catheterization procedure and was told she was good to go for upcoming knee replacement surgery. She is still at Brookdale Spicewood working on getting stronger so that she can go home after more than 5 months. She is hoping to be at church again by Easter Sunday.

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

**Debbie Appel Knowlton** reports that her dad **Vic** is doing pretty well in his new home in a memory care unit in a retirement facility in Wilton, CT—about 45 minutes from where the **Knowlton** family lives. **Debbie** is liking the place they chose for **Vic** after weeks of deliberation. On Feb. 24th, **Debbie** and family and **Vic** visited the Norfield Congregational Church in nearby Weston, CT and he made friends with 2 charming ladies about his age. **Debbie** notes that **Vic** still likes to flirt! One of the ladies lives at the same place where **Vic** lives. They all felt very welcomed by the minister and the others there, so they hope to go again some time. **Debbie** says, "They did not mind **Dad** yelling out "Amen!" now and then. Thank Goodness."



2/17/19 Vivienne with her mom Amelia Fulbright as she cuts the shower cake—in the background, Andrea Low, Ruth Koenig, Stella Stafford, John Goff, Carolyn Thompson, Stephen Russell

## History Corner

1930 Sanborn map of the area around the church (built 1921–22) The cross at the left center marks the intersection of San Antonio and 23rd St. Guadalupe Street is one block to the right. Have you ever wondered who were our neighbors when the church was newer? Enjoy looking at the map above and see if you see anything familiar. We think what is titled Day Nursery eventually became the parsonage and is now our education wing—the Towery Wing.

