

# THE VISITOR

May 2020

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

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Religion should open your heart...

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I've never spent much time in my garage. It's always been the place to store my lawn mower, yard tools, and camping gear. It's where I pile stuff I don't need or want anymore, but haven't yet donated or discarded. After I mow the lawn, the lawn mower makes the garage smell like grass and gas for a few days. In the summer, it feels like an oven in there. I've never felt a desire to hang out in my garage.

But that's changed. I love my garage now. Of all the rooms in my house, it's my favorite (I never thought of the garage as a "room in my house" till recently). I've spent more time in my garage the past six weeks than I've spent in garages my entire life prior to the pandemic.

My garage is a sanctuary.

No I haven't set up an altar in my garage.

But I have set up a little weight-lifting area, with an old bench (pulled from the donate pile), some weights and dumb bells (pulled from the back of my closet), a plastic table my daughter Alex used as her craft table when she was eight years old (also pulled from the donate pile), a blue tarp (pulled from the camping gear shelf), a crunch ball (pulled from the bedroom), and a CD player (pulled from the kitchen).

Physical exercise is as vital to me as air, water, and food. It helps me hold it all together, and keeps me from freaking out or melting down with stress and anxiety. I need physical exercise to maintain my emotional and mental health. If I don't exercise, I get depressed and I don't function. And that's in "normal" times.

For me, physical practice is spiritual practice. The health of my psyche, my spirit, depends on it. The practice of physical exercise involves discipline. It focuses my attention on my breath, my body, correct form, and a whole variety of experiences like clarity, insight, non-dual consciousness, transcendence, as well as resistance, endurance, pain, and suffering. My favorite types of physical/spiritual practice have included running (which I can't do anymore because of injuries), cycling, hiking in mountains, and weight-lifting (all of which I can still do).

Before Covid-19, I went to the gym several times a week. I felt deep satisfaction and joy when I entered the gym, like I really belonged there. It was a healing place, a spiritual place. It was a sanctuary. When I left, I felt renewed, calm, whole, and happy. I felt connected to my soul, existence, God

All of a sudden I lost that sanctuary. But I knew I needed that sanctuary, that I couldn't survive the pandemic without it. So I poked around in my closet, the donate pile, and the camping gear, and I assembled all I could to create a new sanctuary, right there in that place that never appealed to me, my garage.

Doing my physical/spiritual practice in my sanctuary helps me stay physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy in a world that's sick in more ways than one. It gives me respite from the news-saturated and worry-saturated world. It's a place to work out my anger after reading that states are forcing low-wage people back to work without adequate protection by threatening to deny them unemployment if they decide not to return now because the risk is too high (the "endanger your life or starve" policy).

Or after reading about the US pressuring Mexico to re-open the maquiladoras along the border and to force Mexicans back to work despite the high Covid-19 death rates that closed the factories.

I need my sanctuary.

If you need a sanctuary, I hope you have one.

Do you? If so, what?

Maybe it's your house, or a room in your house, or a chair in your room, or a window through which you look outside from your room. Maybe it's something outside like a route you walk, a trail you run, a park, a tree, a garden, a picnic table, a lounge chair. Maybe it's your dog or cat, a book you read, music you love, or baking. Maybe it's a person.

If you need a sanctuary, I hope you have one.

**TOM**

## **June Visitor Deadline May 25, 2020**

### **Church Leadership**

Deacons Chair

Outreach Team

Moderator

Treasurer

Financial Secretary

Christian Education Coordinators

Youth Sunday School

Clerk

Historians

Webmaster

Member-At-Large

Faye Dierksen

Whit Bodman

Joy Penticuff

Gail Christeson

Dennis Murphy

Jaime Hadley

Amy Kent Rivera

Reuel Nash

Pat & Mel Oakes

Mel Oakes

Bill Beardall

## Heart of Texas Association News May

by Liz Nash

**A**s announced earlier, the Heart of Texas Association will be meeting via Zoom on Saturday morning, May 16th. Sign-in begins at 10 am, the meeting begins at 10:30, and we intend to be done at noon or a little after. We will have some extra security in place with a way to sign up to attend through a website link in order to prevent “Zoom bombing” harassment. You will need to sign up to attend in advance so we have the list of people coming, and then you will get the meeting Zoom link. (Sounds complicated but it is easy.) If you do not know how to use Zoom, please email me ([lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com)) before the meeting date so we can help you know what to do or have a friend walk you through it. As primary agenda items, we will be having the Ecclesiastical Councils of **Kerry Kirtley** and **Arlene Turner** whose ordination papers are already available on our Association website, <http://hotaucc.org/>. We believe it will be more important than ever for our churches to speak about their lives together in this challenging time as we share ideas and lift one another up. We will be posting all of the documents for the meeting, including the agenda, financial report, past minutes, and any other written reports on the Association website, and we ask that you download those and read through them before the meeting. (It is harder to read them during the meeting while you are on Zoom.)

The South Central Conference Annual meeting will happen online on Saturday, June 13th in order to do the business of the Conference. The SCC will be sending out information on how this will work. Major items on the agenda will include voting on bylaw changes (posted on our Association website); meeting our new Consulting Conference Minister, **Rev. Dr. Campbell Lovett**; elections; budget approval; and perhaps more that I am not presently aware of. **Campbell Lovett** has already been working with many of us with his wise and caring counsel, helping bring resources on applying for CARES Act money and fundraising to our churches, as well as beginning to be a pastor to us, in this difficult time.

Our Committee on Ministry met by Zoom for the first time during March. The Committee interviewed **Kerry Kirtley** and **Arlene Turner**, recommending them for ordination and, as it turns out, giving them a good rehearsal for their online Ecclesiastical Councils. The Committee also voted to license **Brett Hart**, who is a member of St. Peter’s Coupland and is serving as their minister while **Martin Garrison** is on sabbatical. **Brett** has come to the UCC with about 30 years of ministry experience and a similar amount of experience as a high school science teacher. He left his last church position to begin the Serene Disciple Project at the home he shares with his wife at Egret Isle Farm near Coupland. The Serene Disciple project continues, and you can learn about this unique ministry at <https://egretislefarm.com/about-us/>. We welcome **Brett**!

As I close, I lift up our churches, ministers, and all who are working in creative and challenging ways to do ministry now. Let’s continue to pray for each other and support each other. I also lift up a giving opportunity. The Christmas Fund, run by the Pension Boards of the United Church of Christ, is now responding to many requests for emergency help for pastors and church staff. If you would like to know more or donate, go to <https://www.pbucc.org/index.php/art-ma-landing/opportunities-for-giving>.

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

## Personals by Pat Oakes

**O**ur pastor **Tom VandeStadt** is working extra hard during this isolating, surreal time in our lives—participating in Zoom meetings with committees, working on joint on-line worship services at University Baptist Church with Rev. **Amelia Fulbright**, compiling joys and concerns for us to share during the week, etc. However, one thing we all missed seeing **Tom** do (except for one police officer) was when he transported our large, very heavy wooden cross in the back of his truck from our church to UBC for the Holy Week services. It was a struggle for **Tom** to get it into the truck and it was not too secure. **Tom** looked up and down San Antonio St., saw no one in sight, and decided to take the shorter route and drive south (the wrong way) to UBC. He was on his way when he spotted the police officer who was looking puzzled—saw the unusual cargo in the truck and waved **Tom** on. The cross was in a place of honor on the altar of UBC. **Tom** did not mention if someone helped him get the cross into the sanctuary. **Tom** has promised us that when we can safely gather again in our sanctuary for a service, that we will flower the Easter cross and follow that with our traditional Easter brunch.



4/19/20 Tom giving the sermon on the Sunday after Easter at UBC with the cross on the right

**Jonathan Geer** (writing for **jonnybertolali**) notes, "It's very strange because in one way the three of us are really having a beautiful time together since **Roberto** and I are both working from home and we get to spend all day with **Xitlali**, but on the other hand we are living through this global pandemic and in isolation from all our friends and family. I'd certainly be going a little crazy if I didn't have the two of them by my side! I feel very fortunate in so many ways to have them here with me and to still be able to write music, do house projects and plant things in my garden. **Xitlali** just turned three months this past Monday (April 13th)! She continues to be a very mellow, happy baby. She's very entranced with her little hands right now (apparently it takes a little while before newborns even realize that they HAVE hands!). She goes a little cross-eyed when she holds them up in front of her face and puts them together. She's smiling more and more and trying to talk to us more. Every few days we hear a new sound or expression that we hadn't heard before. At her two month checkup she was about 12 pounds and she continues to eat very well! She's been sleeping through the night since she was two months old as well. My mom was the last person to be in our house with us when she came to meet **Xitlali** and she said it's just not fair and we're not getting 'the full parenting experience' because **Xitlali** is so sweet. We'll take it and enjoy it while we can! I've also taken up sewing. **Roberto** and I bought a machine for our anniversary before we were all sheltering-in-place.



4/10/20 Amelia Fulbright reading the scripture at the Good Friday service at UBC with our church cross on the left

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

I found this awesome National Parks fabric and sewed him a kitchen apron out of it. I'm planning on working up to doing some clothes for **Xitlali**, but I'm not quite there yet. We miss coming to church so much and seeing everybody, but we've been tuning into the livestream services on Sunday mornings. Hopefully it won't be too long before we see you again!"



4/20 Roberto and Jonathan with their daughter Xitlali Hernandez-Geer



4/15/20 Xitlali Hernandez-Geer

**Don Miles** is delighted to share that as of the afternoon of Monday 4/20 that he has a 4th great grandchild. Her name is **Eleanor** ("Ella" for short). The parents are his grandson, **Austin Ritzman**, and his wife, **Abby**. Capt. **Ritzman** just barely made it back from **South Korea** where he is stationed. He had to stay in quarantine for two weeks before joining his wife, and just got out Saturday. The baby was born the following Monday. He'll have to go back to **South Korea** for a few more months. He texted **Don** with photos of himself holding **Eleanor**, and he called **Don** up on "FaceTime" Tuesday. **Don**, the author of a book on Cinco de

Mayo and the Battle of Puebla, notes that celebrations (on Tuesday, May 5) will have to be on Zoom this year. The weekly E-Slab barbecue meetings are continuing. **Don** was attending until he had some computer problems but hopes to be in attendance via Zoom on the 5th with his friend General **Zaragoza** (actually a life-size model).

**John Burlinson** is working from home during the pandemic—which is where he usually works—reading for audio books. He has recorded for Audible, has recorded out of copyright Westerns, University Press books, a series of folk tales, a scholarly book on old southern plantations, LibriVox (free public domain audiobooks) — in a wide variety of genres. Years ago he recorded for the blind. Since he retired, he has more time to do more recording and has found an interesting vocation which pays! He works through the night hours as it is quieter and there are fewer distractions then. **Carol** and **John** are eagerly awaiting the birth of their first grandchild (parents are son **Jake** and his wife **Jackie**) due on May 4th—predicted to be a boy. You might enjoy checking out John's website <https://johnburlinson.com/>.

**George Hetrick** says, "This is the 21st anniversary of the Hill Country Ride for AIDS (HCRA), and my 14th year as a rider. They have raised more than \$10,000,000 for people affected by HIV/AIDS in our community, and this year I want to help them raise even more! Due to COVID 19, the ride this year has gone virtual -- I won't be going down to Krause Springs on Saturday, April 25th, to ride with hundreds of other bikers, but I (and they) will continue to ask you all to donate and help. This money will go directly to 9 local non-profits assisting those in central Texas affected by HIV/AIDS. There are more people in need than ever before, and frighteningly the numbers are rising, especially among our younger generation. I would be so grateful for any donation you can share in my quest to help provide much needed services. The link for the ride is <https://p2p.onecause.com/hillcountryride/george-hetrick>.

**Ruth Koenig** says she seldom has anything for the newsletter, but she just wanted to comment about something positive for her that has come out of this otherwise horrible world-wide disaster — the coincidence that resulted in her being able to stay with son **John** and his wife **Barbara** following her

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

two falls in her apartment in Brookdale has provided her with some lengthy quality time that she doesn't often have with her grown children. Not only has she appreciated their care and thoughtfulness, but they've had time to reminisce and catch up on family affairs. They've also Zoomed with other family members around the country. Some technicality kept her from seeing the service on a recent Sunday. **John** couldn't figure out what happened but she hopes it will work better this Sunday. LAMP (Learning Activities for Mature People—at UT) started last week and some lectures are being scheduled at various times, using Zoom. If it weren't for **John** and **Barbara**, **Ruth** wouldn't be able to see any of these things. She has mixed feelings about the new ways things are presented. She has problems hearing/comprehending women's voices from any source and while sub-titles help, not all programs provide them. Who knows what changes will remain when this is all over?

The Zoom coffee hours each Sunday after the joint on-line service with UBC have an international flair. **Ellie Nash**, her now COVID 19-free husband **Louis Rodgers**, and their adorable daughter **Vivi** (**Reuel** and **Liz Nash's** granddaughter) are regulars. Also attending every week is **Jaana Rehbein** and her daughter **Ella** from **Hannover, Germany**, who very much enjoyed the world-wide WHO concert to raise funds for folks impacted by the pandemic. On Sunday, the 26th, she showed all of us the beautiful lilacs that bloom in her yard. There have been about 20 folks or more at "coffee hour" each Sunday.

**Lynn Chavarria** reports, "Have you ever wondered why grandmothers collect all those pieces of ribbon, scraps of glittery material, artificial flowers, lace, buttons, beads etc.? Mystery solved -- we need them to entertain grandchildren when we are quarantined. Let's have fancy tea parties every week! That means all the ladies have to wear the requisite "fascinators." We even pulled out the fancy handkerchiefs with embroidered and tatting edges. Alas, I believe all the gloves are long gone after many moves over the last ten years. The concept of spending many hours to produce a few inches of tatting is hard for many young people to comprehend. When not preparing for tea parties, making masks has taken a lot of time. Black Darth

Vader (unused costume material), Ralph Lauren English print (shower curtain), and blouse material are included among the scraps. So I am very smug about my many boxes, until recently, stored in the back of the closet. Please save your coffee bag plastic and wire closers. These make the best wires for the tops of masks. Remove them before washing the masks. You can have several masks but only need one wire."



Close-up of coffee bag plastic and wire closer



4/20 Lynn Chavarria's Austin daughter and granddaughter in creative attire during the pandemic

another photo on next page

## Personals (cont)

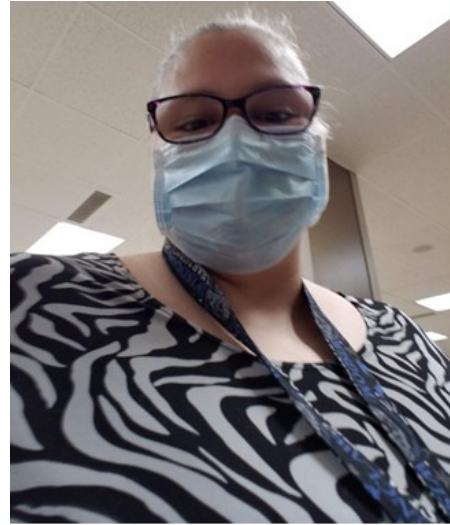
by Pat Oakes



4/20 Lynn Chavarria with her Austin granddaughter having fun making fancy hats during the pandemic

graduation sometime this summer. The school has been featuring seniors on their Facebook page. I am proud to share **Emma's** post with you. At the hospital, we are cautiously optimistic. People staying at home has seemed to have flattened the curve. We are concerned about what will happen when things start opening up. It is a privilege and honor to care for the associates at this time. Caring for patients and their loved ones looks very different and is often gut wrenching. We look forward to the day when visitors can return back to the hospital. One thing that has not changed is babies keep being born. This is a great joy as I continue to care for the prenatal/NICU staff, patients, and their loved ones.”

**CJ Wood**, neonatal ICU chaplain at Seton Main reports, "The end of April and beginning of May is a bittersweet time for my family. We had fun celebrating my younger niece's birthday on April 21st. **Lila** turned 15 this year. She loves Tik Toks! We asked her friends and family to make them for her. Her Facebook and messenger were bombarded with Tik Toks on her birthday. She was over the moon. Others did drive-bys with signs, honking their horns, playing music, and dropping off gifts. Despite the physical distance, **Lila** felt loved and celebrated. Her mom and dad got her a puppy for her birthday. Welcome, **Lorelei** (named after the Gilmore Girls) to our family. April 19th would have been my parents' 46th wedding anniversary. It is the second anniversary since she died. My dad spent the weekend working on his property in East Texas where he will move to sometime this year or early next year. We look forward to celebrating my older sister's (**Gidget**) birthday on May 2nd and my dad's on the 14th. Of course, Mother's Day will be difficult, especially for my dad. He lost his mother 6 weeks after my mom died. We were expecting my younger sister, **Tabitha**, to return home the first week of May. Unfortunately, she is stuck in **Singapore** due to Department of Defense orders to stay in place until June 30th. Now **Tabitha** will likely be home by September. We are grateful she is doing well and is healthy and safe. Most bittersweet of all, my oldest niece, **Emma**, is part of the graduating class of 2020. She picked up her cap and gown the last week of March. Her school has assured them that they will have a prom and



4/20 NICU chaplain at Seton Main CJ Wood models her mask at work



4/20 CJ Wood's younger sister Tabitha on her ship.

**Personals (cont)**  
by Pat Oakes

**Senior Shout Out**


Emma Utley

**High school Life**  
Emma was a member of the Girls Varsity Cross Country team for four years, qualifying for State all four years. She also loved her Education Practicum classes where for two years she helped teach Pre-K students at HES.


**Future Plans**  
Emma plans to attend Lone Star College to get her undergraduate coursework in Education. Then, transfer to either SFA or Sam Houston to finish her Bachelors degree in Elementary Education.

**The teachers, administrators and staff at HES wish Emma the best of luck in her future endeavors.**

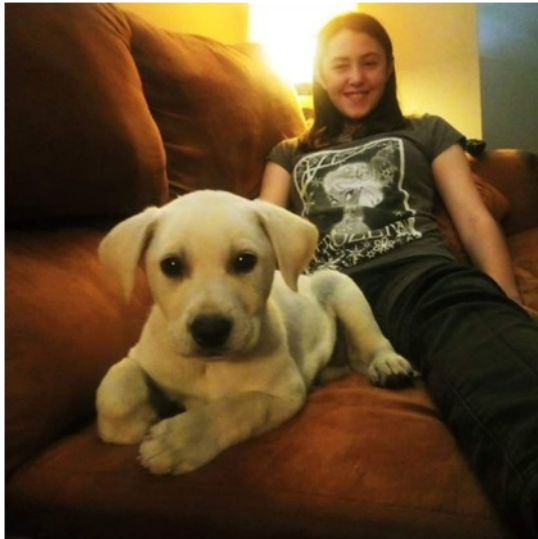
Class of 2020 Strong #Haltensup



**Hargrave High School**



4/20 CJ Wood's oldest niece Emma Utley, class of 2020, Hargrave High School in Huffman, TX



4/20 CJ Wood's younger niece Lila and her birthday puppy Lorelei

**Beth Placek** is doing well and getting stronger. She misses her husband **Chencho** who is staying with his grown children in East Austin for the time being—and he is missing her, too. **Beth** has made friends with 8-year-old identical twin boys and their 6 year-old sister who live a few houses away from her. She enjoys going out walking and watching the children play and ride bikes. Most delightful this past week was experiencing a drive-by birthday

party for the little sister as her friends' parents drove them by waving signs and singing happy birthday.

**Laura Hubbs-Tait** reports from Oklahoma that her mom **Cathy** (aka **Catherine**) is doing well. Westminster Manor had three residents with COVID-19 and all have recovered. Most weeks she can reach **Cathy** after her dinner (served alone in her room to follow COVID-19 rules) at least 5 out of 7 evenings. **Laura** says, "She is often confused -- but so am I in these challenging times!! And, on some evenings, I am so blessed by our conversations! On Wednesday evening we had a great conversation about 'a greenhouse' in which she used to take naps. More conversation revealed that the 'greenhouse' was painted green inside and out -- and had screens. So, it sounds more like a gazebo or screened porch to me. She and her brother used to take naps there and their mother would make naps 'delightful' by reading to them there. She also spoke about having a sandbox and when I asked who played with her there, she mentioned her brother by name and then she added before that, **Shirley**. I asked her whether she meant "**Shepley Nurse**" the name of a girl who seems to have been her best friend when she was very young. She spoke of her 'big house' and how much she (Mom) liked it. We often say Psalm 23 or 100 together in the evening. She knows them both by heart -- still. .... Thanks be to God for God who never intended that we should be separated from each other because we all belong at Christ's table together! Only something as deadly and dangerous as COVID-19 could bring this about!"

Former members **Mary Sinclair** and **Richard Jackson** are not only coping with pandemic concerns in **Canada** (they live in **Heidelberg** near **Toronto**) but are dealing with Mary's back pain and her recuperation from E.Coli induced sepsis. She had gone to Palm Springs 6 weeks ago for a tennis holiday when Palm Springs closed down due to the coronavirus. When she got back, she went into self-isolation for 2 weeks. She has a herniated disc in her back which is being treated by her chiropractor. Mary still spends most of her day resting on her back comforted by their dachshunds but can wander around the house now for 10-15 minutes. She will have an MRI soon. So she still has a long way to go before she returns to the tennis and takes up her role as the tennis phenom

## Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

that she was!! Their “Spring” has been much delayed. **Richard** suspects when the measurements are analyzed that they will find March has been warmer than April. So many mornings they wake up to find overnight snow and then have snow flurries coming off Lake Huron during the daytime. It seems that a series of low pressure systems moving up the US East Coast has pulled cold air southwards and is the cause. They look forward to May. Canada is also in isolation as most US states seem to be. They were somewhat faster to start testing there and perhaps shutting borders [except with the US]. As in the US, **Richard** notes that they were slow in Canada to organize for Covid-19, but after realizing their mistake they seem have got their act together. As of several weeks ago in Canada, there have been at least 40,000 cases reported, which is more than double the number from 14 days before. There have also been at least 14,000 recoveries and 2,000 deaths. Health officials have administered more than 640,000 tests. **Richard** keeps busy juggling a number of balls at the University of Waterloo [investigating leaky abandoned gas wells], the University of Ottawa [chairing the Board of Directors of Canada’s Accelerator Mass Spec lab] and church, which has gone to Zoom for services and council meetings where he is the secretary. He has even been getting royalties from Cambridge University Press for his book, which was a pleasant surprise, and so will be eternally grateful to Henry VIII for granting them a license to publish books. He will be watching Wolf Hall to see this was Cromwell’s idea originally.

Long-time (and long ago) member **Eunice Paul** is in touch from **Surrey, England**. She enjoys the Visitor every month and has this report, “**Lydia** and I are both self isolating at the moment but chat every day. Grandson **Nathaniel Tapley** with wife **Zoe**, and children **Eleanor** and **Thomas** are in **Dorking**, not far away, and grandson **Joshua** is far away in **Graz, Austria**, with his Austrian wife and three children. He was going to come for **Lydia's** 70th birthday at the end of March but that couldn't happen. At the ripe old age of 98 the lock-down doesn't make a tremendous difference to me as I don't go out a great deal but not seeing anyone here is hard. **Lydia** keeps me supplied with food, etc. but only once a week, keeping a social distance as she doesn't want to risk

bringing anything undesirable in here.” Belated birthday wishes to **Lydia!** Stay well, **Eunice!!** And we love staying in touch with you!

Former member **Dennis Schneider** reports from **Japan** that Tokyo Union Church has been live streaming their services and then leaving a recording of the latest one at <https://tokyounion.online.church/>. He says, "Our Easter service is there now, but I don't know if the older ones are there. I've learned to use Zoom thanks to a church group who had an informal meeting this morning. Our choir also used Zoom to sing one number all together for the Easter service, but I didn't try to contribute to that. I'm finding enough to do with free, trashy fiction for my Kindle, using the record function on my TV to catch some US series that are broadcast here with a choice of original soundtrack or Japanese dubbing. They also do some movies the same way, and I have Mary Poppins Returns or something like that to view when I get around to it. So mostly I stay occupied. I will have to go out over the next couple of weeks to at least get prescription refills from a couple of doctors. I also need to get some food, especially vegetables. I do have some frozen chicken, but I need some side dishes. Costco won't admit customers unless they are wearing masks, but of course they don't have any. Their e-mail says check their online site, but the only masks shown are the cosmetic type to make you look younger. That ship has sailed for me, long ago! My sister in **Ohio** and my daughter and grandson in **Oregon** seem to be doing OK, and I get a face-to-face chat with them now and then on Messenger. Some members from my sister's church (**Wilmington, OH** Friends' Meeting) assembled recently in the parking lot of the local Quaker assisted living/nursing home, and keeping safe distance from each other serenaded those living there." Stay well, **Dennis!**

