

THE VISITOR

November 2019

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



There are several times in the gospels where Jesus talks about death and life. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus tells his disciples that the authorities will kill him with a cross. After three days, he'll rise from the dead and live. Jesus continues, if any of you want to follow me as I carry my cross, then carry your cross. If you save your life you'll lose it, if you lose your life for my sake you'll gain it. In John's Gospel, Jesus talks about the relationship between death and life using an image taken from nature—the birth of life, the growth of life, the blooming of life, the harvesting of life's fruit and seed, the cracking open and death of life's seed, the birth of new life from the cracked-open seed.

For many of us, it's probably easier to accept the latter image, natural death at the end of our life-cycle, than it is to accept the image of the cross killing us at some point along the way. Yet even this natural image of death can provoke turmoil deep within us, because though it's less disturbing than the cross, it still foretells the end of our existence here on earth in human form. In the gospels, Jesus himself experiences this deep turmoil. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus suffers turmoil in the garden of Gethsemane. In John's Gospel, Jesus tells people, my soul is in turmoil. But what can I do, tell God to spare me?

Death spares no one. Jesus wasn't spared death, nor was he spared the soul's turmoil that death provokes. Nor are we. Death confronts us in many ways. The reality of our own death. The death of others whom we love with deep intimacy. The death of friends and acquaintances. The death of communities and neighborhoods through the loss of familiar buildings, familiar neighbors, jobs, homes, the natural environment. The loss of traditions, habits, ways of being together, ways of doing things together.

Sometimes death comes within the natural cycle of birth, growth, harvest, seed, and death. Other times a cross kills life, or circumstances kill, or an accident kills. Economists talk about creative destruction. No matter how death confronts us, death can provoke turmoil in our soul. Just as it did in Jesus' soul. And just as Jesus acknowledged the turmoil in his soul, it's important for us to acknowledge the turmoil in our souls as we face death and loss in its many forms.

Those of us exploring the dynamics of our rapidly changing neighborhood and city have been focusing much of our attention on the possibilities for new ways of being the church that all the changes occurring around us are making possible. But we're also acutely aware of the reality of death and loss that's intrinsic to change.

So much in our neighborhood and city looks brand new because we've quickly lost so much of what used to exist. Everything brand new signifies the loss of something that used to be but is now gone. This is provoking turmoil in a lot of people's souls, especially the people who've lived in Austin for many years, who loved the familiar Austin they once knew, and who mourn its rapid disappearance and replacement. The turmoil provoked by loss becomes more acute when people feel they have little or no power to decide what they will lose and what will replace it.

And even more acute when people feel the turmoil they're feeling in their soul isn't being acknowledged and taken seriously.

As we move forward in our vision process, we'll experience both excitement and grief, because we'll face both the possibility of new life and the certainty of death that precedes it. For the health and well-being of our church in a time of change, let's encourage and empower everyone to participate constructively in the discussion regarding what we'll lose and gain, listen to one another with great care and respect, and acknowledge the inevitable turmoil in our souls.

Just as Jesus wasn't spared, our church won't be spared death or the soul's turmoil that death provokes as we pick up our cross to follow Jesus, and as we change to adapt to new circumstances in order to minister to others in his name. But through our faith in Christ, our acknowledgement of the relationship between death and new life, and our love and care for one another, we'll support one another through the turmoil that change brings, mourning our losses together, and celebrating new ways of being the church that are relevant to the time and place in which we live.

TOM

December Visitor Deadline November 22, 2019

Church Leadership

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

November

by Liz Nash

As previously announced, our **Heart of Texas Association Fall Meeting** will be held **Saturday, November 16th** at **Trinity Church of Austin, 4001 Speedway in Central Austin**, <https://www.trinitychurchofaustin.org/>. We are trying a new format for this meeting by having brunch with small sandwiches and hearty finger foods. Congregational Church of Austin is the host in charge of lunch, with major help from Trinity and other Austin cluster churches. The food will be available in the sanctuary and can be brought in at Trinity to eat, so we anticipate letting people get up to get food as they wish during the meeting, instead of breaking the meeting in two parts to have lunch. We will ask people to give a “love offering” of the amount you choose to help with lunch expenses. **Registration and brunch will begin at 10:30, the meeting will start at 11 with worship, and we anticipate ending by 2 pm.** Trinity has a parking lot directly across Speedway from the church. All from our Association churches are invited to join us for worship, in an offering to Friends of the Conference designated for new church starts, for making and renewing friendships, for a business meeting, for the Ecclesiastical Council of **Cam Burton (James Cameron Burton)**, and possibly for a second Ecclesiastical Council. We also anticipate hearing from our seminary students. We also want to save paper so **we will be posting all documents for the meeting (Cam’s ordination paper, the agenda, reports, etc.) on the Heart of Texas Association website at hotaucc.org** a week before the meeting. **Bring a laptop if you can to be able to read items**, as we will only print a very small number of packets.

During the meeting, we anticipate voting on a number of items. We will be bringing to our membership a resolution of continued support for Licensed Ministry, joining with the rest of the South Central Conference in commitment to support this ministry which is being changed in some other areas of the United Church of Christ. We will be voting on a budget for the year to be presented by our Treasurer, **Joe Ward**. We will be voting to allocate a designated amount per person for scholarship money for the upcoming UCC National Youth Event this year, to be held at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana on July 22nd - 25th, 2020.

After the fall meeting, **Trinity will host the ordination of Cam Burton, pending a vote to approve him for ordination, at 3 pm, and all are invited to stay for this joyous event.** The timing for this ordination is unusual, as we normally wait about a month to ordain someone who has a call to a ministry site after an Ecclesiastical Council. However, **Cam** is coming into the UCC from the United Methodist Church, which has a path for chaplaincy ministry that does not require ordination as our UCC process does. Cam is already a certified chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains, having served on the chaplain staff of St. David’s South Austin Medical Center for over 7 years where he currently serves as the Spiritual Care Coordinator. For **Cam** to continue his board certification and ministry at St. David’s after ordination in the UCC, he needs to be ordained and then endorsed by the national UCC chaplain endorser as quickly as possible.

We hope many of you can come to our Fall Meeting and stay for the ordination we anticipate happening. And, to add some fun, we will be having dessert and a door prize at the end of the meeting. Come and see what goodies we come up with!

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals by Pat Oakes

The church welcomed five new members on Sunday, October 28th. To help folks get acquainted, here is some information about our new church family members. **Judy Rae Lord Allen** was born in Waukegan, IL. Her father was in the Coast Guard during WWII. When she was six, the family moved to Albuquerque. **Judy Rae** went to college at Eastern NM State University, earned a B.S. degree, and met her future husband. **Judy Rae** belonged to the Congregational Church in Albuquerque and was married there. Later the family moved to Ft. Worth, and **Judy** completed a BFA degree there in speech/language/hearing therapy. She later earned a Master's Degree from Sam Houston State University when they were living in the suburbs of Houston. They ended up moving to Odessa where **Judy Rae's** husband worked at Zapata Oil with George H.W. and Barbara Bush. **Judy Rae** taught at Midland Lee High School and was a librarian there. The family then moved to Lafayette, LA, for 21 years, where **Judy Rae** worked for the State Department of Education, where she secured funding for children's education. She became executive director of a free health care clinic in the 1980s. Then she worked for her family's consulting business. In July, 1997, **Judy Rae** had a brain tumor, which was discovered when she sought treatment for tinnitus. She had surgery in 1998 and suffered stroke symptoms and partial paralysis. Her husband developed dementia in 2010-2011, and **Judy Rae's** son **Brett** cared for his father until he passed. **Brett** and **Judy Rae** then moved to Austin to be near **Judy Rae's** son **Rodney**, who was already living here. Besides **Brett** and **Rodney**, **Judy Rae** has another son, **Jesse**, who works with the Corps of Engineers. She has one grandson, who is a teenager, and four 4-legged grandchildren!

Brett Allen moved with his family from the Houston area to Odessa, then to Lafayette. They belonged to the Congregational Church in Houston, where **Brett** was baptized. **Brett** received his education at TCU in marketing. When he was living in Lafayette, he worked at a savings & loan, and then in some of the family businesses, including as office administrator. **Brett** was his father's caregiver when

his father developed terminal dementia. When **Brett** and **Judy Rae** moved to Austin, he accepted a position at Whole Foods Market, where he is on the produce department team and is the team representative on produce outreach and monthly volunteer events. **Brett** and **Judy Rae** came to us several months ago and felt at home in our church. **Brett** often contributes lovely floral arrangements in the sanctuary. **Brett's** recent schedule has kept them from attending regularly, but they are glad to be a part of this church family.

Lynn Chavaria grew up in Florida, has lived in Georgia and North Carolina, but lived most of her life in Houston and now Austin. Her early careers were in public school teaching and computer programming. **Lynn** spent the bulk of her career in commercial real estate development in Houston. She moved to Austin to be near her daughter and her family. **Lynn's** last church was Holy Covenant UCC in Charlotte, NC, where she served on the finance committee board and the endowment committee. She has two children and one granddaughter who is, as the old saying goes, the compensation for growing older. **Lynn** already loves our church for the friendly people, beautiful music, and outreach work.

Kay Pruett has been a teacher at the School for the Blind in Austin since 2001. She grew up in Seattle, Washington, in the Presbyterian Church. She has been associated with many churches and in addition to joining our church, she continues her membership in St. James Episcopal Church in Austin. One important reason for her joining Congregational Church is not only that it's compatible with her religious views, but also that it's easy for her to take public transportation to church. **Kay** rides the bus to support her commitment to a sustainable environment. She appreciates the importance of the social justice mission and outreach activities of our church and the role of our church in improving the lives of families, especially those marginalized through social injustice. **Kay** and her former husband, **David**, lived for some time in the College Station area, where **Kay** was a member of the United Church of Christ Friends Congregational Church. Her daughter is married and

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Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

lives in Seattle; her transgender son is living and supporting himself in Dallas. **Kay** remains friends with her ex-husband, and David sent her his good wishes on her new faith journey with us.

Gregory Callahan is currently taking a “gap” year between his graduation from Simsbury High School in Simsbury, CT., and his freshman year of college. **Gregory** was an active member of the First Church of Christ UCC **Gregory** was confirmed by First Church and was an active participant in the youth program “Pilgrim Fellowship.” Many of us were moved by the powerful reflection **Gregory** presented as a worship gift on Oct. 20th. **Gregory** has been and continues to be involved in international programs that seek to improve the lives of vulnerable youth. He already has become active in the social justice work of Austin/Central Texas Interfaith. It was delightful to meet **Gregory’s** mother, who traveled from Connecticut to Austin (on her way to a maternal-child healthcare consultation in Uganda) to be present as Gregory became a member of our church.

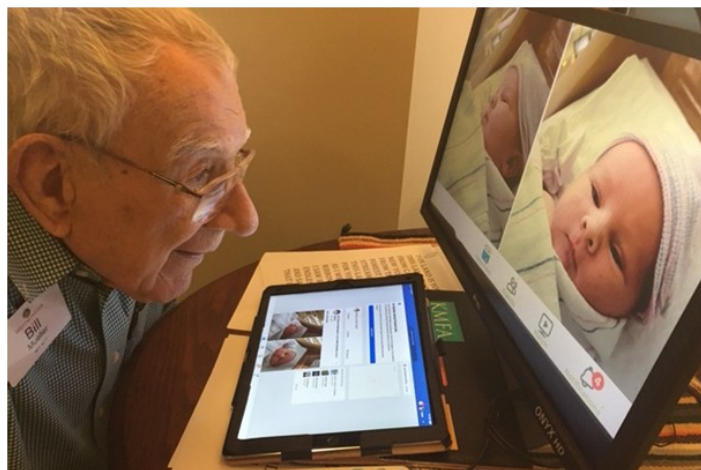


10/27/19 Deacons introducing new members--Judy Rae Allen and her son Brett Allen, Barbara Burnham (deacon), Lynn Chavaria, Joy Penticuff (deacon), Kay Pruett, and Gregory Callahan



10/27/19 New members Brett Allen and his mom Judy Rae Allen, Kay Pruett, Greg Callahan, and Lynn Chavaria at coffee hour after joining the church

During joys and concerns on Sunday, October 27th, **Joan** and **Bill Mueller** offered heartfelt prayers for the safe arrival of their first granddaughter (2nd grandchild). To their great joy, in Long Beach, California, **Charlotte Grace** was born to their son **Matt Mueller** and his wife **Bonnie** late that night. She weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces, and was born by C-section after a long day of waiting.



10/29/19 Here is a photo of Charlotte Grace less than a day old communing with her grandfather Bill Mueller

A good group gathered at noon on Saturday the 28th of September in Eastwoods Park for a potluck church picnic near the UT campus and the home of **Whit** and **Betty Bodman**. Folks brought good food to share—also some bats and balls, chairs and fans. It was a warm day, but there was a brief shower which cooled things off.



9/28/19 Church picnic in Eastwoods Parks--Andy Dierksen, Don Miles, Faye Dierksen with Starbuck, Harrison Tucker, John Goff, Whit Bodman, Warinda Harris, Betty Bodman, Tom VandeStadt, Lynne Lemley, Joy Penticuff, Pam Tucker and the Tucker family's exchange student, Lucia, from Spain

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

On October 3rd, the Congregational Church of Austin made its now-customary big splash at the Equal Justice Center’s annual fundraiser at Peter Pan Mini-Golf fundraiser. Not only did church members contribute as a leading sponsor for the event – making CCoA a “Pillar of Justice” – more than a dozen church members took part in the fun, demonstrating both their prowess on the mini-golf course and their appetite for Franklin BBQ, Ethiopian stew, and craft beer. The Congregational Church has for many years been a faithful and esteemed supporter of the Equal Justice Center’s immigration and labor justice action for low-wage working families. EJC executive director and church member, **Bill Beardall**, gratefully remarked, “The EJC has many valued donors and sponsors, but our staff and clients draw particularly warm inspiration from the support and fellowship of our brothers and sisters in the Congregational Church.”



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Bill Beardall, Smee, and Captain Hook



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Sarah Darter helped with serving the food



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Andy and Faye Dierksen



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Debby Kohrt with grandchildren Caleb and Zooney Parkhill

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Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Sara and Dave Ross, Pam and Harrison Tucker, Tom VandeStadt, Bill Beardall



10/6/19 Andy Dierksen, Don Miles, and birthday girl Catherine Hubbs



10/3/19 The Equal Justice Center Peter Pan Mini-Golf Tournament--Betty and Whit Bodman with Pam and Harrison Tucker—also present were Andrea Low and Mel Oakes

October 6th was a special coffee hour after church. The congregation celebrated **Catherine Hubbs's** 97th birthday (one day early) with great joy and enthusiasm. Her daughter **Laura Hubbs-Tait** was at church to lead the festivities with 4 (count them—4) cakes. With a little help to stand, **Cathy** blew out all of the festive candles on one of the cakes. Daughter **Ann** and son **John** came to Austin later that evening and were with Cathy to celebrate on the actual day, October 7th.

We have been missing **Amelia Fulbright**, her husband **Jonathan Zercher** and their children **Vivienne** and **George** on Sundays. Amelia is stepping down as the director of the Labyrinth program effective mid-January and has been providing pulpit supply on Sunday mornings at University Baptist Church. She will be their interim until they call a new pastor, hopefully in the spring.

Jonathan Geer and **Roberto Hernandez** are excitedly looking forward to becoming adoptive dads sometime between now and mid-December. The birth mother-to-be is in Houston and they are now getting more updates regarding due dates. We can't wait to welcome your son, **Jonathan** and **Roberto!**

Debby Kohrt had a great ten day visit to Oconomowoc, WI, to meet her 4th grandchild, **Brynn Maxine**. Parents **Jarod** and **Laurel** touched **Debby's** heart by giving **Brynn** the middle name of **Maxine**, **Debby's** late mom's first name. Adjusting pretty well is 2-year-old big brother **Wesley**.

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



BRYNN MAXINE KOHRT

born August 29, 2019 | 7:44 am | 8 lbs 13 oz | 20.75 in
proud parents Laurel and Jarod Kohrt

9/15/19 Brynn Maxine Kohrt, Debby Kohrt's 4th grandchild, born on August 29, 2019—lower right with her big brother Wesley

Jo Jensen reports, "Once a year, every year, somewhere in America, the U.S. Army Wolfhounds gather to share stories, remember their fallen comrades, and celebrate the long history of the 27th Infantry Regiment. Established in 1901 by an act of Congress, and later nicknamed "Wolfhounds" after Russian **Admiral Kolchak** (in 1919 the regiment was called to Siberia to support the White Russians in their battle against Communism – the Red Army). In an act of gratitude, **Admiral Kolchak** gave the regiment a purebred Russian wolfhound and the rest is history. A century later, In August 2019, **Bob** and I drove Stella (our camper van) to Nashville for the Wolfhounds' Reunion. And magical things happened along the way. Tranquil state parks with lake views, magnificent sunsets, and grazing deer became part of our nightly rest stops. Our stop in Memphis gave us enough time after dinner to locate and drive to the well-preserved Lorraine Motel where **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** was assassinated. An evening cruise down the Cumberland River in the historic General Jackson Riverboat provided us with night views of the downtown Nashville lights, outstanding musical performances, and a semi-tasty meal. For me, this reunion was more mindful, meaningful and memorable because I paid attention to the stories being shared. On several short strolls down the Nashville Marriott hall toward the dining room, I noticed pockets of men (3-5) at various intervals. Each small

group was recalling some event from their tour(s) in Vietnam. I did not have to overhear all the words to realize these brothers-in-arms were forever joined in spirit through their mostly treacherous and occasionally humorous experiences. My eyes leaked all over my cheeks when a gray-haired man dressed in St. Louis Cardinal red pushed through to grab **Bob's** hand and say, 'You're the Commander of Company B who rescued us after our leaders were killed. I thought we were all going to die and then you somehow managed to break through to rescue us! I never thought I'd see you again to thank you. I'm so glad you're here! Thank you, **Commander Garrett!**' Whew! That was an emotional meeting. I deeply regret not having the presence of mind to capture that special moment with a photo. I did, however, capture **Bob** with the current Wolfhound 2nd Battalion Commander. We chose to leave Nashville via the Natchez Trace Parkway, enjoying the 50 mph two-lane roadway where no commercial vehicles were allowed. Historical, peaceful, 18-wheeler-free, and beautiful... especially in the on again/off again rain. An unplanned stop in Tupelo, MS (birthplace of **Elvis**) offered us yet another surprise. After spending a pleasant rainy night in Lake **Elvis Presley** Park, we found ourselves driving Veterans Parkway which led us to Veterans Memorial Park and a magnificent replica of the Vietnam Veterans Wall. This was truly a trip to remember!"



LTC Robert Garrett (Retired) with LTC Matthew Lee

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

The **Nash** family enjoyed a mini-reunion on the weekend of October 12th. A friend of all three **Nash** daughters, **Ellie**, **Annie**, and **Becky**, got married in Austin, so **Ellie** (with five month old **Vivi**) flew in from Toronto and **Annie** came into town from Vermont for the occasion (**Becky** lives and works here). Another dear friend of the three who was not part of the wedding came in from California to see everyone, too. **Liz** and **Reuel** babysat at home during the wedding evening for **Vivi** who really missed her mama! They all even managed to squeeze in a brief visit to Waco to visit with **Liz's Kultgen** cousins. That Sunday, adorable **Vivi** made her debut at church with her mom and cooed and grinned and delighted everyone. That was also Back Bay Mission Sunday at church and **Liz Nash** led the service, **Reuel** prepared phenomenal shrimp for coffee hour, and **Fran** and **Rambie Briggs** came and shared their long history with Back Bay. Some of you out there will remember the wonderful visits we had years ago from the Back Bay folks who came with Gulf shrimp from Biloxi—featuring an educational program on the mission and its services and a fabulous all-you-can-eat shrimp boil for all of the attendees.



10/13/19 Ellie Nash with her daughter Vivi Rodgers who made her church debut on Back Bay Mission Sunday



10/13/19 Liz Nash and Fran Briggs at coffee hour after Back Bay Mission Sunday



10/13/19 Rambie Briggs sharing memories of the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

On the get-well-soon list, **Nodie Murphy** is continuing to recuperate from her knee replacement of more than a month ago. Dennis has been a superhero taking care of her. She is hoping to be back in church by mid-November. The choir and the congregation will welcome her with open arms! **Beth Placek** did go home as scheduled last month but within a day she had pulled a groin muscle while trying to open a stubborn window in her house. She has been in a lot of pain, is slowly improving, and hopes to be back with us soon. Her husband **Chencho Flores** has been doing a great job taking care of her. **Liz Nash** is recuperating from ACL surgery on her knee on October 18th. The surgery came to pass because one of their large dogs barreled unexpectedly into her knee while they were in the Berkshires this summer. She is spending lots of time on the couch and **Reuel** is looking after her very well.

Carolyn Thompson had been hearing a lot about **Aaron Sorkin's** new stage production in New York of "To Kill a Mockingbird" with **Jeff Daniels** playing the lawyer, **Atticus Finch**. **Carolyn** sent a review to her daughter **Catherine** in Boston thinking she and her family might go down some weekend to see it. Instead, she suggested **Carolyn** fly up and the two of them have a mom and daughter vacation in Manhattan! So that's what she did over Columbus weekend. It was lots of fun but exhausting. On Saturday morning **Carolyn** went to the **Guggenheim** and **Cooper Hewitt** museums, and that evening **Catherine** took her to Katz's Deli for their famous pastrami sandwich. She also had matzo ball soup for the first time. Hands down, it was the best meal of the weekend. The play on Sunday was excellent — and it was lovely to spend one-on-one time with her daughter she does not get to see that often.

Congratulations to **Kevin Dietz** who has been awarded the individual Lotus Award for 2019 by the Asian Family Support Services of Austin (AFSSA). The lotus is a symbol of self-regeneration as its long stalk is rooted in muddy water producing a beautiful blossom which rises out of the murky water. **Kevin** is in good company along with previous recipients including **Marshall Thompson**, **Carlos Salinas**, **Judge Lora Livingston**, Council Member **Ora Houston**, **Geronimo Rodriguez**, **Gloria Terry**, and more. He has worked with AFSSA both in his

role as the Family Team Manager (10 years) at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid and now in his more recent stint in private practice (three years). He has worked with a number of AFSSA's clients in contested divorce and custody matters on either a pro bono or reduced fee basis. He is a resource for AFSSA's legal advocates. **Kevin** notes that the primary benefit that he provides is that he always answers the phone when AFSSA calls. The organization is so grateful to **Kevin** for his legal expertise in working with immigrant survivors of sexual assault, family violence, and trafficking. **Kevin** has helped so many Asian and immigrant families' rise up and bloom like the lotus. A banquet and awards ceremony will be held at AFSSA's Silk Road gala on Saturday, Nov. 2nd, at the Hyatt Regency on Barton Springs Road. The organizational recipient was Foundation Communities.



10/27/19 Kevin Dietz, winner of the Lotus Award from Asian Family Support Services of Austin, at coffee hour a week before the awards banquet

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

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10/19 Carolyn Thompson had a great time in NYC with her daughter over Columbus Day weekend

On Saturday, November 23rd, Tapestry: The Austin Women's Choir will present their fall concert entitled "Still I Rise". This year's concert season will honor the work of the Suffragettes. On June 4, 1919, Congress passed the 19th amendment and it was ratified on August 18th in 1920. **Lucy Erda** will be performing in the concert both as a member of the choir and as a member of the auditioned choir, Loose Threads. The program will include songs from the Suffrage movement and songs that honor the strength of women. The concert will take place at Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, 7050 Village Center Drive, Austin, TX 78731, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment.

Sharon Brown has had a long-time interest in land use and development in Austin. She believes that Austinites should acquaint themselves with the new Land Development Code and its pros and cons. She urges you to watch the locally produced 30 minute film "Zoned Out", (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsYOurWEoSc>) that summarizes the opposition arguments to the proposed new code and to contact your city council representatives and share your views.

Our hearts go out to **Martin** and **Emily Garrison** on the loss of their 23-year-old foster son **Jeremiah Peterson**. St. Peter's UCC Church in Coupland was packed with family and friends on Saturday, Oct. 5th. **Martin** and **Emily** were active members of the Congregational Church of Austin several years ago, and when **Martin** was a seminary student, he completed his student internship at our church. **Martin** is now the pastor of St. Peter's Church of Coupland. Pastor **Liz Nash** led the service and a number of members from our church were in attendance. If you would like, send a note to **Martin** and **Emily** at St. Peter's Church of Coupland, 108 Wathan St., Coupland, TX, 78615.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

In preparation for their 50th anniversary celebration, **Dave Ross** has been going through some of the church archives at the request of the People's Community Clinic which started in the basement of the Congregational Church of Austin in 1970. At that time, the Board of Trustees granted approval for weekly use of the basement of the church for a medical clinic. Medical treatment was given by volunteer workers in the clinic to people who could not afford or could not obtain medical services from other facilities in the city. **Mel Oakes** (aka Sherlock Holmes) has searched high and low and found many articles about the clinic—one of which appears here. There will be more to follow.

Serving those in need

Congregational Church provides space, support for **People's Community Clinic**

The basement of the Congregational Church of Austin is, in some respects, what you'd expect the underpinnings of an older building to look like.

Beneath the sanctuary at 408 W. 23rd St., thick, old walls separate rooms of varying sizes and levels. There's a kitchen, with a choir room just around the corner.

But across from the kitchen is a converted room that serves as an examination area, with private cubicles for the patients of the **People's Community Clinic**.

The kitchen (no longer used by the church) long ago became a laboratory, and the choir room does double duty as an office for nurse/practitioners during office hours.

The basement has been given over to the **clinic** plus a floor of an attached building, which provides much-needed office space. But despite a willingness to share its facilities, the church does not run the **clinic**.

"Our connection is one of mutual cooperation. The church donates space, and we pay for the electricity. The church is supportive of the work we do, but we are a separate entity. We are a private, non-profit group receiving federal, state and city funds," explained Roseanna Szilak, executive director of **People's Community Clinic**.

"This church is affiliated with the United Church of Christ, which historically has had a mission and a viewpoint which embraced wholeness for all **people**, particularly for the less advantaged persons. So our value system as a denomination embraces health care," said Sarah Bentley, interim pastor of Congregational.

"It's logical for a church that can extend space to health care because it's part of a vision of wholeness for all **people**. It's like there is no justice until everybody can eat, have a place to sleep, and have access to medical care."

People's Community Clinic began in 1970 when two doctors, a psychiatrist and an oncologist approached the church about donating space for a free **clinic**. They were concerned about the number of young transients in need of health care, especially for sexually transmitted diseases. They wanted to make medical services available for those who needed them regardless of ability to pay.

"They thought it would probably



Photo by Sara Burden-McClure

Roseanna Szilak and Sarah Bentley represent two institutions working together to serve those in need.



Sara Burden-McClure

Neighbor religion editor

die in a year or so," former pastor John Towery said with a chuckle. "After they put in a lot of time and energy, it just kept going for a while on a volunteer basis. It began to pick up folks here and there, and just kind of grew. There always was a need for it."

He said that the **clinic** also began serving **people** who could afford neither health insurance or visits to the doctor, such as the families of university students and the working poor.

The **clinic** gradually acquired funding for treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, gynecology, family planning, prenatal care, and general medicine. It was one of the first alternate test sites for HIV

testing and counseling in Texas. In 1989, it is estimated that the **clinic** will handle 16,500 patient appointments for 9,000 individuals. Patient fees are on a sliding scale.

The paid staff of 23 includes a full-time physician and 3.5 nurse practitioners. Some 85 intensively trained volunteers cover many functions from clerical work to family planning counseling. Lab services and a pharmacy are available.

Szilak noted that while the **clinic** has grown from a small collective-style organization to a large, more traditionally-managed group, it has maintained its original ideals.

"We believe that basic health care is a right and should not be a privilege. We have a very deep respect for individual human life, which the church also shares. We believe in the empowerment of the patient through information, and are strong advocates of patients' rights."

She credited the congregation's generosity and tacit support for the survival and growth of the **clinic**. Church members do more than simply accommodate the **clinic** —

many, including some doctors, volunteer at the facility. In addition, the church has always had a representative on the **clinic's** board of directors. Szilak said that the **clinic** had also received a denominational grant of \$7,000.

"I think there is a sense of expressing our mission in supporting the **clinic** in the ways that we can," Bentley said. "I think it represents something very valuable for a lot of **people** in the congregation; they believe in it. Everything they represent is something we affirm. Their values are the dignity of the person, respect for the patient, and access to health facilities for all.

"What we have is two institutions living side by side and sharing the same principles. It's a unique working relationship. It's also a unique expression of religious commitment for us because we don't make a statement, we don't tell **people** what to think. We don't say that this has to be a *Christian* medical institution or whatever; it's there, that's the way we believe, and we do what we can to support it. So we make our statement not by words, but through actions."

4/27/89 Austin American-Statesman article on People's Community Clinic—Sarah Bentley was our interim pastor for 6 months in 1989.