

THE VISITOR

November 2020

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

408 West Twenty-third Street, Austin, Texas 78705-5214

(512) 472-2370

E-mail: ucausti@swbell.net

Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



Jesus can be a pretty unsentimental guy sometimes. The upshot of his Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids in Matthew 25 seems to be the old hardboiled advice: sink or swim. Come prepared, have what you need, and when the times comes, you'll be let in. Come unprepared, don't have what you need, and when the times comes, you'll get left out. It's that simple. The choice is yours. Sink or swim.

Some people, when they hear this story, get upset at the maids who have what they need for not sharing with the maids who don't. But that misses the point, because the parable isn't about sharing. Jesus talks about sharing elsewhere, but he's not talking about sharing here. Jesus tells this story in response to a question the disciples ask him: when will this age end, and when will the new age begin?

Through a series of stories, Jesus tells them he doesn't know. It could be any time. But expect delays. You could be waiting longer than you think. And it may come when you're sleeping—you may suddenly wake up and realize, the time has come, it's here now. So be prepared. Have what you need at hand. If you do, you'll enter the new age when it comes. If you don't, you'll get left out. It's as simple as that. Sink or swim. Pretty unsentimental hardboiled advice.

You are responsible, Jesus says. It's *your* responsibility to make sure that *you* have what *you* need, when the time comes. *You* have to prepare *yourself* to enter the new age, others can't be prepared for you. *You* have to do *your* work, whatever *your* work entails, others can't do it for you. *You* have to walk *your* spiritual path, others can't walk it for you. *You* have to undergo *your* transformation, others can't undergo it for you. It's *your* heart, *your* mind, *your* spirit, *your* soul. It's *your* life. It's *your* relationship with Christ, with God, with reality itself. Not someone else's. So *you* be prepared. Have what you need at hand. If you do, you'll enter your new life, the new age. No one else can enter for you.

We're in the midst of a pandemic that's driven us out of our sanctuary and pushed us physically apart from one another. According to some best case scenarios, we could be worshipping in our sanctuary again by the fall of 2021. According to those scenarios, we could see a vaccine sometime after the New Year. It could take the spring and summer to successfully roll the vaccine out, make it widely available, and verify that it's really working.

By next fall, we could be back in the sanctuary. That's roughly a year from now. We've been worshipping and being the church physically separated but digitally connected since mid-March—8 months. We could still have 10 to 12 months to go. In this best case scenario, we're not yet half-way through this pandemic, through this way of worshipping and being the church. Of course, things could happen faster. Maybe we're past the half-way point. Or things could happen slower. Maybe the best case scenarios won't pan out, and we're not as close to the half-way point as we hoped. Maybe things will happen—politically, economically, environmentally, with the disease itself—to further complicate, and delay, the end of this pandemic era, and the beginning of the post-pandemic era.

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Who knows when this pandemic era will end, and the post-pandemic era begin? No one knows. Not even Jesus. But let's heed his hardboiled unsentimental advice. Let's make sure that we, as a church, have what we need, so that when the new time does come, we have what we need to enter it. Because if we don't have what we need, we'll get left out. It's as simple as that.

So what do we need? As a church, what do we need to see the pandemic era through to its end, and to enter the post-pandemic era that will follow—whenever that time comes, with whatever opportunities and challenges that time brings?

One thing we need is money. Money is not all we need, and if it's the only thing we have, we're in big trouble, we're not really a church. But money *is* one thing we need to continue our existence and our ministry as a church, so that when this time we're in right now finally ends, we, the Congregational Church of Austin, can enter the new time. The Board of Trustees, that most hardboiled unsentimental of Boards, knows the hard-boiled unsentimental truth: whether we sink or swim as a church depends on whether we have the money we need to pay our staff, care for our property, make our worship videos, support one another, and maintain our Christ-like presence in the world.

We've swum through 8 months of this pandemic together as a church. Let's keep swimming. Let's make sure we have what we need to keep going, to keep being the church, to keep worshipping together, supporting one another, and being a Christ-like presence in the world, so when this era finally ends, we can enter the new one. If you're able, please pledge your financial support for the Congregational Church of Austin's 2021 ministry. We will dedicate our pledges on Sunday, November 15. Thank you!

TOM

December Visitor Deadline November 27, 2020

Church Leadership

Deacons Chair	Faye Dierksen
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	Joy Penticuff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Dennis Murphy
Christian Education Coordinators	Jaime Hadley
Youth Sunday School	Amy Kent Rivera
Clerk	Reuel Nash
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News
November
by Liz Nash

Our Heart of Texas Association Fall Meeting met on Zoom on Saturday morning, October 24th. We had a good turnout with 13 of our churches represented. Open Cathedral led our opening with a video worship on YouTube that included excellent music -- with one of the musicians sharing from out of state, creative video segments, and a reflection by **Ryan Hart**. We appreciate deeply their skilled, faithful, and uplifting work.

The meeting began with a time of recognition for Hope United on their tenth anniversary. Their council president, **Jim Robichaux**, shared about their send off for **Ron Trimmer** as **Ron** and his family left for Missouri, the recent interim time with **Kyle Walker** leading worship, and the exciting news of a new designated pastor coming on board. **Jeremy Albers**, Director of Slumber Falls Camp, shared with us that the camp is in difficult financial condition because all of the groups that were scheduled to come have canceled due to COVID-19, stopping the major revenue stream. Slumber Falls was able to have our UCC summer camps last summer due to careful planning and hard work to keep people safe (no one got sick), but the revenue that is needed to support the camp is missing for now. **Jeremy** is working quarter time, and major fundraising is needed. We also recognized and lifted up our chaplains with great gratitude as they continue their life giving work in this time of real risk. Our attendees connected with a breakout time in small groups, and representatives from each of the churches present shared quite a bit about the life, challenges, and things to celebrate in their churches -- always a rich time in these meetings. Finally, we appreciated the excellent presentation that **Campbell Lovett**, our Interim Conference Minister, gave on the proposed Unified Conference level

Fitness Review Committee and the work needed in the next few months to be able to make a decision on whether to join with the other South Central Conference Associations in forming this committee.

An important decision at this meeting, made during our financial report time, was to donate \$5000 of our dedicated youth funds to Slumber Falls Camp. We did this both to show our financial support and because we had funds set aside to give scholarships to the National Youth Event last summer, which had to be cancelled as an in-person event. Also, we are encouraging our churches to give as generously as possible to Slumber Falls.

I also shared the news of my trip last week out to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi to deliver 110 hygiene kits -- 100 from Friends Congregational Church and 10 from Friedens Gay Hill -- along with a check from Friedens. The staff at Back Bay Mission welcomed me and received our gifts with joy, as the need among the homeless people they serve with these particular donations is greater than ever. We are encouraging giving to Back Bay Mission along with Slumber Falls as an offering from our churches.

We offer congratulations to **Crystal Silva-McCormick** and Church of the Savior. **Crystal** has been their designated pastor since **Mary Wilson** retired last spring. In this role, a designated pastor has a contract for a specified period of time, during which the pastor and the church can decide to make the call a permanent one as a settled pastor. Church of the Savior recently voted to call **Crystal** as their settled pastor. Our joy and prayers for a thriving ministry go with **Crystal** and Church of the Savior as they embark on this profound calling together.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals
by Pat Oakes

Faye Dierksen gave birth to an 8 lb. 4 oz. son on October 8th. She was in hard labor for 12 hours and the doctors decided that a C-section was the right thing to do. They went home the next day! **Faye** and **Andy** have named him **Deek Charles Dierksen**, after **Andy's** grandfather. **Andy's** grandfather lives in Chadron, Nebraska, and his name is **Harold "Deek" Dierksen**. They decided to use just Deek—great alliteration! **Andy** and **Faye** will be celebrating one month with their **Deek** on November 8, 2020! So far they have enjoyed lots of snuggles, new facial expressions, and even a few tears here and there. They have all so enjoyed having **Deek's Grambu, Cameon**, with them during this first month. **Faye's** mom's group of girlfriends (The WIW's or Women In the Woods - **Faye's** 14 other mothers in South Dakota) call her that. It originated when they were writing a song for her 40th birthday several years ago and decided that **Cambu** was easier to rhyme than **Cameon**. (Happy Birthday **Cambu**, Happy Birthday to you), so she just naturally kind of became **Grambu**. She wasn't entirely sold on **Grandma** anyway. On October 20, 2020, the family celebrated **Grambu's** birthday by visiting Sweet Berry Farms pumpkin patch and driving through the Hill Country. In November, baby **Deek** gets to meet his great-grandfather **Deek**, his godmother and **Aunt Maggie** and cousins **Wyatt** and **Chance** as well as his **Grandma Tracy!**



10/13/20 5 day old Deek makes his screen debut on the Tuesday e-Slab barbecue gathering--hosted by his parents, Faye and Andy Dierksen



10/20 Cameon (Grambu) Jacobson (Faye's mom) is delighted to be here to snuggle with her new grandson Deek



10/8/20 Newborn Deek Charles Dierksen

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Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



10/20 Andy and Faye Dierksen enjoying some outdoor time with their newborn son



9/22/20 Patricia McLaughlin and George Hetrick celebrated their wedding at the Tiny T Ranch on the Equinox

George Hetrick responded to the Personals query with "Well, let's see, I'm sure something interesting must have gone on ... Oh, that's right, I GOT MARRIED!!! My wife is **Patricia McLaughlin** (we each kept our names). We got married on the Equinox (Sept. 22) near Austin at the Tiny T Ranch. <https://tinytranch.squarespace.com/>. It was an elopement (basically just us and an officiant), and was a lot of fun. We met at a folk music concert (**Eliza Gilkyson**), which was organized by her old roommate at the end of 2014. I did enjoy getting all westerned up. I'm done working — my contract ended at the end of July, and I'm calling it done. No honeymoon until travel normalizes. We are planning to move to the Venice, FL, area, which is near family for her." Congratulations, **George and Patricia!!** We all wish you a wonderful life together. You will be missed here in Austin. Do come back for the Hill Country Ride for AIDS next year!



9/22/20 Patricia McLaughlin and George Hetrick celebrated their wedding at the Tiny T Ranch on the Equinox

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

Fran and Rambie Briggs are breathing a huge sigh of relief. Their son **Jonathan** is home after four days in the hospital being treated for COVID 19 as of mid-October and says that he is feeling better. He is still coughing ("I only cough when I talk!"). His family is being supportive and he will take the next two weeks off from work. His supervisors also forbade him from trying to manage his job remotely. The folks he cares for at the group homes are also recovering as well as could be expected. They aren't sure where he contracted it, but his work brings him into contact with many different people. He is Program Director for 27 group homes and several day care facilities in NC. The agency is UMAR (formerly known as United Methodist Agency for the Retarded).

Cathy Hubbs had the best 98th birthday gift she could ever have wanted—her daughter **Laura Hubbs-Tait** drove from Oklahoma for her first in-person visit with her mom since early March. **Laura** is so distressed that the quarantine is taking an unexpected toll on isolated senior citizens. They are well-taken care of physically, but they are so missing the social engagement of seeing family and friends. It is a terrible dilemma. While here in Austin, **Laura** coordinated Zoom calls with her siblings and **Cathy's** grandchildren. So **Cathy** had a wonderful several days while **Laura** was in town and had trouble understanding why **Laura** couldn't come back right away. **Laura** hopes to be back for Thanksgiving.



10/5/20 Cathy Hubbs was delighted to have a birthday visit with daughter Laura who took the selfie.



10/7/20 Cathy Hubbs celebrating her 98th birthday in style!

From October 9th-16th, the **Kohrt/Parkhill** family enjoyed a safe vacation at Canyon Lake, TX. They rented a house via Airbnb, and were very pleased with the roominess and, of course, the pool and hot tub. The owners have Longhorns, which they enjoyed feeding. The swimming pool was an extra treat for the kids since they had not been swimming all summer due to the pandemic. They had beautiful weather while there and all of them had a great time just getting away.



10/15/20 Brave Debby Kohrt and granddaughter Zoey feeding a hungry longhorn

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



10/15/20 Longhorn posing with Jason Parkhill, Caleb and Zoey with their grandmother Debby Kohrt and mom Kristen

Becky Nash reminisced recently how much fun she had years ago trick-or-treating on Halloween with **Alex VandeStadt**. **Liz** or **Reuel** would take her to **Robin**, **Tom**, and **Alex's** house. **Becky** and **Alex** each wore the exact same costume each year after long discussions on what character to choose. Their favorite thing to do was to make lots of noise at each house in the neighborhood, knocking loudly and shouting "Trick or Treat!" No timid trick-or-treaters were they.

Carol and **John Burlinson** continue to enjoy and cherish every minute they get with their darling grandson **John Min**. He is almost six months old and is thriving as you can see from his picture. He is ready for socially distant trick-or-treating, too.



10/20 5 month old John Min Burlinson is all set for Halloween with his "My mummy loves me" shirt!

Beth Placek gave herself a birthday treat by driving to Fredericksburg on her big day, Oct. 14th, and staying two nights at her favorite place, The Sunday House. She did some walking in Fredericksburg, but spent much of one day exploring Mason, TX, which she has been wanting to do for years. She notes that the drive between Fredericksburg and Mason is just gorgeous. She loved seeing the beautiful courthouse as Mason is the county seat for Mason County. **Beth**, who never meets a stranger, found a delightful coffee house, Yocuppa Coffee, and enjoyed visiting with a number of folks there. While back in Fredericksburg she delighted in taking a lovely evening stroll. She is walking well and feeling stronger all the time.

Lucy Erda had a memorable adventure in October—a road trip with a friend to and from Tumwater, WA. She was gone from 10/7 to 10/16. It was the first time she had a vacation where she got to travel and see the country. They passed through areas of incredible beauty while also knowing that passing through was the best idea. They used common sense by checking when they stopped at a place. If no one was wearing masks, they drove on. And yet, as is **Lucy's** custom, she headed out on the road with a few dozen origami hearts. It was her simplest fold but it came together so the design of the paper showed through. She could tell people were not accustomed to receiving art and were delighted. There was double delight from the waitress who asked, "May I trade this color for pink so I can give it to my daughter?" and instead, **Lucy** told her she would be happy for her to have a second heart for her daughter. She was not expecting passing so close to Laramie where a young gay man, **Matthew Shepard**, was brutally murdered in 1998 would have such an emotional impact on her. She realized that the isolating effect of the quarantine had kept her emotionally shut down. Seeing Laramie helped her see that she really is still alive. A delightful discovery was that heavy whipping cream kept in a cooler turns into very hard whipped cream after eight hours of driving and that it makes a cup of black coffee a decadent treat. She got to try deviled eggs with bacon bits and caviar. She realized a life-long dream of seeing the Rockies and visiting Colorado. Someday, she hopes she can take this journey again but stop along the way

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Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

for a few days. She has stepped further out of her "box" than she has ever gone in her life—even further than when she made her move from Boston to Austin. She is more open to change than she ever thought she

would be. She is happy to report that she self-quarantined for 14 days when she got home. Welcome home, Lucy!!



10/11/20 Lucy Erda took this panorama shot along the Oregon Trail

Here's another reason to pay close attention to our stellar trio when they are playing during our weekly on-line church service. On Sunday, the 18th of October, if folks were paying attention during the prelude (Prelude in A flat by **César Cui**), what should they see but **Jonathan's** cat **Prue** sauntering in while they were playing. **Prue** strolled around a bit, and then jumped up on the bench to join **Jonathan**. (see it now at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNdaR4aBqn4&t=325s> about 5 minutes in).

Jonathan says she and her brother, **Tybalt**, just like to be around the action whatever it is and wherever it's happening. She does like to hop up on the piano bench a lot when **Jonathan's** playing. The unflappable trio didn't miss a beat. No word as to whether or not **César Cui** liked cats, but it is clear that **Prue** liked **Cui**! **Jonathan** says it is very likely that we will see more cameo appearances as long as the trio continues to record in **Jonathan's** studio.



/18/20 Jonathan and Roberto's cat Prue made a cameo appearance during the prelude at church on Sunday

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Betsy Russell celebrated her 80th birthday in great style at the home of her daughter Amy in Asheville, NC—quite close to the retirement community where Rollin (who was the assistant conference minister here) and **Betsy** live. It was a socially distant gathering with everyone masked, but everyone so enjoyed being together. The **Russell** “kids” were all there—**Stephen** (husband **Scott** and their son **Ryan** were not able to go), **Bethany** and her husband **Joe** and son **Austin** were there as were **Amy**, her husband **Michael** and son **Ben** (their daughter **Emma** is away at college) and granddaughter **Margit**. **Betsy** is still enjoying her weekly Boxing for Parkinson’s sessions. They keep her in shape and help her let off steam at the same time!

Jonathan Geer reports, "**Xitlali** has been babbling a LOT the past few weeks. It's "da-da-da-da-da-da-da" ALL day long. Fortunately it's a beautiful sound that we love to listen to all day long (unlike some of her amazingly ear-piercing shouts which she also does from time to time). We took her camping with some friends at a private ranch in the hill country a few weeks ago and had the most wonderful getaway. The night sky was probably one of the most incredible we'd seen in our lives. All three of us just laid our blanket in the grass and stared up into the heavens and let our souls be still for just a little while. It was truly restorative. We so miss having regular church on Sundays, though. Praying we'll be able to all see each other again someday soon!"



3/4/19 Betsy Russell Boxing for Parkinson's



10/18/09 Roberto Hernandez, Xitlali, and Jonathan Geer and friends on a camping getaway near Garner State Park

Mary (Towery) and **Danny Masters** celebrated their 45th (!) wedding anniversary on October 23rd with a local family gathering. Except for sister **Sally** and her husband **Tommy** who live in the Boston area, the families live fairly close to each other—Georgetown, Taylor, and Round Rock. They enjoyed looking at pictures from back in the day. Congratulations, you two!!! Where has the time gone?

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Many of us are nostalgic for our beautiful sanctuary where we have gathered together so many times. Here is a view of our lovely altar tapestry which may remind you of what we will share when we are back “home.” The church history site includes a section on the tapestry and an explanation by fabric artist. **O. Hinkel (Hink) Johnson** of the symbols one sees in the tapestry. For those of you who are new to the church, you may find this very interesting, too. There is also a section which has a series of pictures of when the tapestry was restored by members of the church in 2012. **Dave Ross** found information in the 1979 annual report that a new pulpit, altar, communion table, and tapestry were custom-made and installed at a special dedication service (we hope to find that out for next month), and two chancel chairs were refinished to coordinate with the other furnishings. In the 1980 annual report there is an expenditure item of \$817 for the tapestry.

To see more about the tapestry, go to

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/Tapestry.html>.

