

THE VISITOR



The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

In her book, *Borderlands, La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldua writes, “The U.S.-Mexican border *es un herida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds.”

Anzaldua’s image of the border, a graphic and disturbing one, suggests any place or situation on our planet where people scrape against each other and rub one other the wrong way, be it nations, economic classes, ethnic groups, religious faiths, political parties, or two people living together in the same house. This grating, scraping, and rubbing the wrong way conveys any unhealthy relationship that involves domination, oppression, exploitation, racism, sexism, homophobia, ethnic prejudice, or religious intolerance. The bleeding wound conveys the tension, distrust, anger, contempt, hostility, violence, pain, and suffering that the friction between people opens up.

To use the words of Mary’s Magnificat, it’s where the mighty grate against the lowly and maintain their dominance by the heavy weight of their thrones, the sharpness of their swords, and the terror of their crosses. Mary celebrates God’s promise, or what she sees as the fulfillment of God’s promise, to put an end to this grating relationship and to heal her people’s open wound. Indeed, this is the central perennial hope of her people—that God will one day intervene in human history and bring about a massive transformation of all human relationships. No more rubbing the wrong way. No more bleeding. All wounds healed. The reign of justice and peace.

We’re still awaiting that time.

Open the newspaper, watch the news on television, log on to the internet, and you’ll see the world is still filled with grating relationships and open wounds—places where people are rubbing each other the wrong way and bleeding, if not physically, than emotionally and psychologically, politically and economically.

It’s hard to bear. It’s hard to read about, watch, and listen to.

When will it stop? When will people be reconciled? When will the wounds be healed? When will there be peace on earth?

Is God going to intervene someday in human history and bring about a massive transformation of all human relationships?

Personally, I don’t believe so. But even if so, what do we do until that time? Just wait?

No.

In the November 25th edition of *The New York Review of Books*, Neal Ascherson reviews a book written by Ian Frazier entitled *Travels in Siberia*, a memoir in which Frazier chronicles a number of successful, somewhat successful, and downright unsuccessful attempts to cross Siberia by car and train. In his review, Ascherson writes, “A Russian car journey is not just about getting there, but about what you do when you don’t.”

That’s how I see our human predicament.

For millennia, people in our faith tradition have hoped, struggled, and dreamed of getting to that coveted destination—the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, the new heaven and earth, the New Jerusalem—where justice and peace reign, where everyone lives in harmony and enjoys health and wholeness, and where nobody harms anybody else. But we’ve never reached our destination. In our collective human journey to the Promised Land, we’re perennially broken down and stuck somewhere in the middle of Siberia.

As Christ’s people stuck with the rest of humanity somewhere in Siberia, and the Promised Land a distant dream well over the horizon, I think our response is two-fold.

One. Keep the dream of the Promised Land alive. Even though it’s well over the horizon, don’t ever give up hope on arriving there one day. One way ancient Jews and early Christians kept that hope alive was by believing peace was a *promise* God had made. God would intervene and bring about a massive transformation that would lead to peace. Believing that God is trustworthy, and that God fulfills all God’s promises, they believed God would one day fulfill this one.

Though this is a core element of our faith tradition, this traditional view of God and peace is not one I share with my spiritual ancestors. I don’t place my hopes in a cosmic Being called God to fulfill an ancient promise made to people

thousands of years ago. Nevertheless, the notion of peace as God's promise is still a powerful one for me in the sense that I appreciate the incredible power inherent within a divine promise. That is, I appreciate the power of tenaciously holding on to hope *as if* it were a promise made by a being I knew to be eminently trustworthy and capable of fulfilling the promise. For without a hope this tenacious to motivate us to take responsibility for creating a just and peaceful world, the chances of creating such a world are slim to none.

Two. As Christ's people, it's our mission, ministry, and calling to make life on this planet as bearable as possible for everyone living on it for as long as we're all stuck together in the middle of Siberia. Making life as bearable as possible means responding compassionately to people's pain, whether we're causing it or not, and prophetically addressing whatever's causing that pain, whether we're the cause or not.

This is what it means to be Christ-like healers, reconcilers, and peacemakers in a world in which grating relationships and open wounds persist. This is our task on earth until that time when peace does reign on earth. If and when that time ever comes, Christ's people can celebrate with a big party. And if that time *never* comes, then that is simply our task as Christ's people forever. To be healers and reconcilers in a wounded world that will forever need healing and reconciliation. To be a peaceful presence and a community of peacemakers in a perennially un-peaceful world.

So, as we enter a new year together, may we have the faith, strength, courage, humility, mercy, and compassion to be Christ's healers, reconcilers, and peacemakers in a world that for now, and maybe forever, so desperately needs healers, reconcilers, and peacemakers.

Tom

FROM THE TRUSTEES

The Trustees have been drafting the church's 2011 budget.

Chairs of our Boards

Trustees:	Jaime Hadley & Rhys Ulerich
Deacons:	Jen Howicz
Christian Outreach:	Reuel Nash
Moderator	Barbara Burnham



MICAH 6 NEWS

As many of you know, Micah 6 has now become a full partner in the Freeze Night ministry in the Lifeworks Drop-In Center in our church's Appel Room. Several of the Micah 6 churches have joined us in providing food and volunteers, including University Ave. Church of Christ, University Christian, All Saints' Episcopal (which is continuing its Freeze Night work formerly done at St. Austin's Catholic), and University Presbyterian. Micah 6 has also allocated funds to pay the anticipated costs of the Lifeworks overnight staff. In addition, the Micah 6 Board has joined with Tom VandeStadt, Will Hancock, Annette Palmer (from Lifeworks), and Terry Cole (Street Youth Ministry of Austin and Lifeworks volunteer) to begin a Street Youth Working group to find ways for the Micah 6 churches to work together to find other ways to be helpful to University area street youth. This initiative marks the beginning of a new ministry for Micah 6 in addition to the major work of the food pantry, allowing us to move forward with the mission of Micah 6: "to work together to identify and meet the needs of the homeless and the impoverished in the University of Texas campus area."

During the months of August - November, the Micah 6 food pantry at University Presbyterian church served between 1367 and 1815 people each month, with many more in benefiting from the food in the families of those who come. We have also worked to set up a Speakers Bureau program to provide speakers to churches and community groups, and we are now ready to go with presentations. (Contact me at lizknash@gmail.com if you want to schedule a presentation).

There are two coming events that we encourage you to be part of:

- 1) The Annual Micah 6 Combined Worship on Jan. 16 at 3 pm at University United Methodist. Choir participants gather there at 2 pm. (See <http://www.uumc.org/?q=node/76> for parking information.)
- 2) Micah 6 is a local beneficiary this year of the CROP Walk, to be held at Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park on March 5 and 6. Set aside one of these dates to join the walk!

Liz Nash,
Congregational Church of Austin Micah 6 Board Member

PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

It wasn't decided whether or not to have a pageant until December 5, but there was a wonderful **Christmas pageant** on Sunday, December 12. The children rose to the occasion (coached by Sunday school teacher Robynne Heymans and child care provider Emily Everidge) and presented the age-old story with their own special flair. The narrator was Megan Goff. The angel Gabriel was Tess Howicz. Additional angels were Francesca and Isabella Dietz and Skye Scott. John Dietz was a good shepherd with his tiny sheep Juliann Lippert. The innkeepers were played by Scarlett and Juliet Quisenberry. Sterling Scott was an admirable donkey bringing Mary (Vivian Summerlin) to Bethlehem with Joseph (Harrison Tucker). The baby Jesus was visited from afar by two Wise Women--Rose Summerlin and Savanna Tucker. (See pictures at the end of the *Visitor*).

Beth Gleason, one of our in-care seminarians from the Austin Presbyterian Seminary, has accepted a position as a seminarian intern at the Church of the Savior in Cedar Park for the next two seminary semesters. She will begin there on February 1st and work with Pastor Mary Wilson until the end of August. **Martin Garrison** serves our church as an intern now and Beth will assume a similar role in the Cedar Park church. This means she will be at The Church of the Savior three Sunday's a month. The fourth Sunday she will be able to return to us. Beth will continue to serve as a Deacon on the Board of Deacons and will participate in the choir on the Sundays she is with us.

When **Elizabeth Long and Daniel Bradley** met with the Deacons to talk about joining the church, Daniel shared that he had not been baptized and wanted to be baptized soon. The Deacons and Tom told him of several possibilities, but he was most interested in the story of Jaime Hadley's wonderful baptism service in the Guadalupe River at the church conference center at Slumber Falls several years ago. So it was arranged for the baptism to take place at Slumber Falls on Saturday, December 11--just about the time a cold front was to blow through. Martin Garrison reported that it really was not all that cold--especially if you were one of the folks standing on the shore! Tom read several texts about the importance of water as a sign and a symbol and led a liturgy before he and Daniel waded into the water. The group of about a dozen gathered about 4 and then enjoyed a meal together after the baptism. Present were Nodie Murphy, Whit Bodman, Tom VandeStadt, Jaime Hadley, Beth Gleason, Jen Howicz, Elizabeth Long, Betty Bodman, Daniel Bradley (newly baptized), Emily Howicz, Robin Chapman and Ranae Beeker. Folks brought various dishes, but the real hit of the meal was the risotto and pork loin prepared by Daniel and Elizabeth. (Pictures at the end of the *Visitor*). Jumping right in to church activities, Elizabeth and Daniel hosted coffee hour after church the next day.

Rhys and Michelle Thompson Ulerich very much enjoyed a bookish baby shower for their new little one on Sunday, Nov. 28, during coffee hour. Books were given by several individuals and a trio of books was given by the Deacons on behalf of the congregation. The baby

boy, at this writing, has not yet made an appearance. Michelle graduated from St. Ed's on Dec. 11, and baby boy Ulerich was due on the 21st. It was certainly an interesting Christmas for them this year! We will include all of the details of the new arrival in the February *Visitor*. (See photos of the shower at the end of the *Visitor*.)

Pastor emeritus **John Towery** and his wife **Eleanor** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in great style with a party given by their daughter and son-in-law Mary and Danny Masters at their lovely home in Georgetown on Sunday afternoon, December 5 (the actual date was December 9). While the Massachusetts contingent (Sally and Tommy Johnson, et al) of the family was not able to be there (saving their money to come to Ches and Maggie Towery's son K.C.'s wedding in April), there were many family members and old friends there to wish them well. John and Eleanor are looking forward to the arrival of a great-grandchild in January--Ricky and Monica Masters are the parents-to-be.

Joe McMillan is adjusting to a different life after the loss of his aunt, Cora Gordon, who died on November 20th at home while Joe was on business in Florida. Her caregivers had done her hair the night before she died peacefully in her sleep. Aunt Cora (whom we all came to know and love) came to live with Joe a little more than 5 years ago and Joe was her main caregiver. She joined and attended church regularly for the first few years she was here, but then her age caught up with her. Aunt Cora earned two masters' degrees and taught school for almost 40 years. She lived a long and good life dying at the age of 97. Joe took Aunt Cora home for the funeral service which was held in Savannah, GA,

Vic and Betty Appel had a lovely trip to La Jolla, CA, in early December. They were there for the wedding of Vic's brother Bruce to his Norwegian bride. Betty sang a song for the wedding and each family member spoke about the bride and groom during the service. Vic and Betty continued their travels in December as they went to visit Vic's daughter Debbie, Bob, Emily Grace and Samuel in North Salem, NY. Betty also got to meet a new great-grandchild while they were in the area.

Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers landed in Billings, MT, on Thanksgiving Day. The area had had snow and below zero days! On the 27th, another storm hit the area with more than 8 inches of new snow. George's nephew and wife live at the end of a road, on a high plateau above Billings. While snowbound for a day and a half, they watched the entire Lonesome Dove series and ate all of the turkey and fixings! Needless to say, Marilyn and George know why they live in Central Texas in the winter!

It was great to see **Barbra Burnham** at church on Sunday, Dec. 12. She sang in the choir, visited briefly during coffee hour and then was off for the annual Jane Austen Christmas dinner with her Jane Austen club. She is enjoying her new job in the Victoria area, but is finding that she is working very long hours.

Enid and Jim Ross reported that newlyweds Julia Ross and Robin Rosson left on their honeymoon trip to Italy on the 18th of December. Celia, their youngest daughter, finished her first role at Oklahoma University in early December. She played the nurse in a run of "The

Man Who Came to Dinner."

By the time you read this, **Mary and Matt Blackstock** may have found the perfect dog for them. Their long-time pet Annie died several months ago and they really miss the company of a dog. Matt and Mary, having had dogs even before they had children, can't stand not having a dog--so they are in the market. The requirements are that the dog be out of its puppyhood, a shepherd or lab or any mix thereof, and either gender. Happy hunting! Soon there should be a new dog to welcome to the family.

Christy Kuhner is recuperating from knee replacement surgery which she had the Monday after Thanksgiving. Her doctor is the same one who did Nodie's knee. After some time in rehab, Christy is at home. She has found that her neighbors have been very helpful--and Christy is very grateful to Jaime Hadley for all of his help with driving as he lives just a few blocks away from Christy.

File this tip from **Bill Phillips** away for next Christmas! Bill says, "We have discovered a neat way to save the expense and time of preparing the annual Christmas tree. We constructed a tree from stacking three giant tomato cages on top of one another and spray painted it gold. We then stuffed it with angel hair and piled it with ornaments. Following last year's Christmas, I just put it in the garage, as is. This year, all I had to do was take it out and put it back in the house."

Many folks remember **Jeri Winter** who was at UT as a student for several years and was very active in the church. She reports that she and Ray Gradecki were married on 10-10-10--makes the wedding date easy to remember! Their son Wylan is doing wonderfully. He is a smiley giggly 7 month old little boy who is growing very fast! He's working on turning over now. He does it from time to time, but definitely hasn't mastered the skill. Ray is finishing up his second semester of nursing school and doing well. He's about to start a job as a CNA that will likely lead straight into a nursing job when he's done with his nursing program next year. Jeri is looking forward to moving out of the in-laws' home and into their own. She wants to have their own Christmas decorations! Speaking of which, this year's Christmas tree at the Winter household is OBNOXIOUSLY large (a long-time tradition at her childhood home). They live a few blocks from a UCC church so Wylan and Jeri have been going, but she says it doesn't even begin to compare to CCA. She says, "What a wonderful church and how I was blessed to be part of it for a few years."

We have sorely missed **John and Lois Drachenberg** who moved from the Austin area to Florida a little over a year ago. They have both continued to deal with health problems, John with diabetes, osteoporosis and high blood pressure, Lois with various things including a mystery ailment (now determined not to be lupus) that was finally diagnosed as excessively low blood calcium dating back to some mistake during a goiter operation in 1961 when her parathyroid was nicked! Now, with high doses of Vitamin D, she's singing her high notes once again and feeling renewed. They are both singing in the choir at a UCC church near them (16 miles away, but considering how far they drove--all the way from Bastrop-- when they were here, that's not so far). Lois had a very tough year

but said, "What helped me through this year was singing in the choir....I think the Holy Spirit is with me when I sing." The director has been very thoughtful, arranging for a high stool for her to sit on when the choir sings longer works. She is currently using a walker and expects that John will also soon. They miss our church, but Lois said, "I made up my mind to adjust, and I did." (That's a great lesson for us, isn't it?) She added, "We miss all of you so much. I am grateful for the 7 years we had there, and to know there are such people as you all are." They are hoping to see Hannah Norton at some point early in the New Year as she is not too far away in Gainesville, FL.

Beth Placek reports that she placed in her age group in a race in Johnson City!! She was second--and yes, there was a third!! Way to go, Beth!



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

1	Bob Breihan	19	Jamie Adams
3	Suzanne VanderPoel	20	Paul Deisler
9	Cameron Goff	22	Mary Masters
16	Annie Nash	23	Danny Masters
18	Brad Ferguson		Liz Nash
	Betsy Ferguson	28	Yoshikuni Kaneda
	Paul Deisler	30	Robin Chapman
	Kaitlyn Newell	31	Julia Ross



12/4/2010

Congregational Church of Austin~

Thank you so much for your outpouring of love and support following my sister's house fire.

They really appreciated the donations of money and clothes as well as household items.

Thank you again!

Brazos Association News

Friedens Church of Washington has gone through a pastoral transition. At the end of October, George Klett finished a full and much appreciated interim ministry. On November 1st, Greg Felder began as the acting pastor at Friedens. Friedens is in pastoral search and, as acting pastor, Greg may be considered for and called as the permanent pastor. As many of you know, interim ministry is a specialized ministry to help the church in the transition period between permanent pastors – through a period often marked with sadness at the departure of a minister, decisions about church needs and the future, and perhaps a time of trying out some different ways of worship and ministry together. Greg Felder's ministry comes after a substantial interim time, so the decision was made that he can be considered for the permanent position if he and the Friedens decide to proceed in that way. Greg is a Licensed Minister in our Association, has served as the Associate Pastor at St. John's UCC in Burton, and is a friend to many of us. Our best wishes and prayers are with Friedens as they continue their search process, and with the church and Greg as they join in ministry at this time.

John Boydston, Pastor of Evangelical Church in Lyons and Friedens in Gay Hill, and his wife, Linda, are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this December. Instead of having their usual Pastor's Open House in December, they lifted up this special day by having a reception in the Evangelical Church Fellowship Hall where people brought food for the Somerville Area Assistance Ministry. What a marvelous and blessed way to celebrate by sharing. Congratulations to John and Linda!

Many of us may not know that St. Peter's Church of Coupland has worked to bring a much needed ministry to Coupland and the surrounding area for the past two summers. Using money from a grant, they have had a twice weekly St. Peter's Community Summer Program at the church to supplement the three day a week program at the local school. The church offers a meal and activities including computer and art classes at minimal cost for the kids who come. In addition, the church has been building an outdoor play area that is now covered for all weather use by the church and the Coupland community. St. Peter's, which is located prominently in the center Coupland on the hill, is a blessing to the whole community.

Hope United in Georgetown is rejoicing at the growth and vibrancy of their ministry. They now meet for worship each week at 10:00 am in the Heritage Oaks Clubhouse. With signs to guide people to the right place, they are easy to find. Their worship is filled with enthusiasm, warmth, welcoming child care, and good music. In addition, they host Bible Study groups in Georgetown and Burnet, as well as a number of outreach activities (see <http://sites.google.com/site/hopeunitedonline/> and also on Facebook). Pastor Ron Trimmer reported that, after beginning weekly worship in October with an attendance of around 30, they had 45 people in worship on December 12, all from the Georgetown area. We join with Ron and Hope United in saying "Praise Be to God!"

We have many more fine and vibrant ministries in the Brazos Association. It is a joy to share them with you!

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Brazos Association Minister

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for February VISITOR — January 21



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