

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus



“To find our calling is to find the intersection between our own deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger.”
Frederick Buechner

What a powerful teaching this one sentence contains.

Our calling is something we *find*. Though we may just happen to stumble upon it, finding our call implies a search. It also implies that if we don’t search for it or stumble upon it we may go through life without ever discovering our deepest calling, which is to say, without ever discovering who we really are.

Our calling is an experience of deep gladness. Not mere happiness or material satisfaction. Deep gladness. A deep and profound sense of rightness or authenticity. A sense that I’ve discovered and grounded myself in my truest most genuine nature. This is who I am, this is what I must do with my life, and this is when I feel most deeply glad to be alive.

Our calling connects us intimately to the world’s deep hunger. Discerning and learning to live out the deepest aspiration of our soul isn’t a self-centered, self-absorbed, or self-interested activity. It’s about opening our hearts and minds to other people and the earth, and responding to the world’s needs with compassion and wisdom. It’s about finding the precious gift within ourselves—the pearl of unequalled value to cite one of Jesus’ parables—then meeting the world’s hunger with our gift and discovering our deepest joy in doing so.

That’s not to say any of this is easy. Much of it isn’t easy. It takes quite a bit of time and effort to search for and live out our calling. It takes discipline and commitment, which is the very meaning of the word *discipleship*. It takes a willingness to experience all sorts of pain and to let go, again and again, of who we think are so we can come closer to discovering who we really are. It must become our highest priority and greatest passion.

We live in a world which provides little support for people who seek to find and live out their soul’s deepest aspiration. The various systems in which we live are geared more toward training people to fit in and to be useful than they are toward supporting people’s quest to find their most precious gift and to share it with the world. Seeking, discovering, and living out our deepest calling is truly counter-cultural and subversive because it awakens us and liberates us from conformity to the dominant political, economic, social, cultural, and religious systems in which we live.

Jesus called this counter-cultural and subversive activity “seeking first the kingdom of God.” In his own life Jesus sought first the kingdom of God. He sought and discovered the deepest calling of his soul, awakened to his most authentic identity as a prophet, rabbi, and healer, passionately lived out his calling, and fully embodied his identity. It’s no surprise that the powers-that-be considered Jesus counter-cultural and subversive. He didn’t fit in and he wasn’t very useful to them.

Not only that but he led others astray. One of the world’s deepest hungers Jesus fed was the desire other people felt to discover the precious pearl within their own souls, to awaken to their own authentic identities, and to live out their own calling.

Follow me, Jesus said.

You’re not a leper. You’re not a tax collector. You’re not a prostitute. You’re not an outcast. You’re not a fisherman. You’re not a rich young ruler. These are not your true identities.

Follow me to discover not only who I really am, but who you really are.

And then, like me, you’ll feed the world’s hunger, heal the world’s wounds, and reconcile the world’s conflicts.

As a prophet, rabbi, and healer, Jesus also sought to create an on-going community of support that would outlast his own life on earth, a community that would continue to guide, encourage, and support people in their efforts to discover their treasure and to offer themselves as prophetic, compassionate, and wise gifts to the world. A community that would be, by its very nature, awakening and liberating, counter-cultural and subversive.

We are that community in its contemporary form.

Each one of us responsible for discovering that intersection between “our own deep gladness and the world’s

deep hunger.” But each one of us is also responsible for creating an environment that encourages, guides, and supports others in their search, and their discovery, and their embodiment of their most treasured, most authentic self, the self we call our Christ-self.

So let us support one another in discovering where our deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger intersect.
Let us support one another in being Christ to the world.

Tom

HOMELESS FORUM DRAWS ATTENTIVE AUDIENCE, OFFERS AVENUES FOR CHANGE

Speakers at the January Board of Christian Outreach-sponsored Justice Forum Painted mapped depth and breadth of homelessness in our community. A large crowd listened as they mapped out some places that we can go as individuals and as a community to make a difference in the lives of the young people on the periphery of our church.

First up was Mitch Weynand, Chief Operating Officer for Lifeworks. He acknowledged our church’s history (back to the start of People’s Clinic in our basement) and current involvement as we house and volunteer for Lifeworks administrative, medical, social, and freeze nights. He said that from various counts it appears there are at least 6000 homeless in Austin, and other encampments further out of town. Estimates of how many are under 25, many of whom we see in our area, are hard to come by. Some 80-120 homeless people die on our streets each year.

Mr Weynand described the initiative of the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (while acknowledging that there is no such thing as an “end” to homelessness), one of the organizations affiliated with the Community Action Network. It focuses on preventing homelessness by briefly supplying basic needs like extra food or a month’s rent; shelter and transitional living through numerous organizations, including Salvation Army and Lifeworks; and permanent supported housing, primarily for the mentally ill who cannot live independently.

Of great concern are the likely state budget cuts to prevention and treatment programs. One program that is “zeroed out” in the proposed budget ends a program to reintegrate offenders into work and housing. He recommended that we advocate for such programs with the City Council members and our state legislators. Additional reports on local issues are available the Community Action Network.

Ryan Miller, team leader for the Transitioning Youth program of CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) described challenges for the many kids leaving foster care at 18 with little but a sack of clothes. As foster

children age they are less likely to be adopted or returned to their original families, so his team focuses on teenagers who need special attention to get a high school diploma or GED, help with adult living skills, and building an ongoing support network before they turn 18 and are released from court supervision. Volunteers with CASA take a 30 hour orientation and make a one-year commitment to work with one child for about 10-15 hours a month. More information is available through CASA’s website.

Giving us some sense of the psychiatric and substance abuse issues and services for youth was Dr Karen Brooks, medical director for Cedar Crest. It is located in Belton but serves many Austin children and adolescents through its psychiatric hospital, residential treatment center, and other programs. Her feeling was that foster kids’ mental health (anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia) and substance abuse issues (which almost always co-occur) are not different from those of the general population, except that post traumatic stress disorder is more common in them. She said that although the foster care system “graduates” them at age 18, their brains’ frontal lobes (needed for planning and assessing risk and consequences) don’t mature until about age 21.

Dr Brooks stated that approximately 50% of Cedar Crest’s patients are referred by the foster care system and are in a revolving door between various health services, the courts, and the probation system. She described them as “the lucky ones,” still young enough to receive services and have monitoring through the court. Because most of those children get health coverage through Medicaid, the proposed 10% cuts in the upcoming budget are likely to reduce their access to care. She agreed that we need to push back against such proposals and volunteer for organizations like Lifeworks and CASA.



Barbara Sterling has changed her email address
from bhsterling1@sbcglobal.net
to: bhsterling1@gmail.com

Chairs of our Boards

Trustees:	Jaime Hadley
Deacons:	
Christian Outreach:	
Moderator	Reuel Nash

PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

Ozark Rhys Ulerich, son of Rhys and Michelle Thompson Ulerich, was born on Christmas Day, 2010, at 12:46 in the afternoon. He weighed 7 pounds 13.5 ounces and measured 20 inches from head-to-heel. Rhys reports that Ozark's doing quite well and has passed his birth weight as of Jan. 20. Michelle's starting to get back into dance training mode, and they're both getting used to running on a little less sleep. (see photo at the end of the on-line version of the Visitor).

Julia Ross and Robin Rosson have returned safely from their honeymoon to Amsterdam, Milan, Rome, and Venice! Due to heavy snow, many flights to Amsterdam were canceled, but they were lucky enough to arrive (more or less) on schedule. After an evening trek through the snow and a delicious Indonesian meal, they had an early night and woke up the next morning to fly to Milan. Over the course of three days, they walked every square inch of the city. Highlights were Il Duomo, The Last Supper, and Milan's famous Reverse Happy Hour (a buffet of free food with your glass of wine.) After Milan, they took a train to Rome, where they spent the next several days of their trip. They stayed in a bed and breakfast just four blocks from the Vatican. Robin enjoyed the Forum and Palatine ruins while Julia got a hefty dose of modern art; they experienced delicious cuisine, including Roman artichokes, many wonderful pastas, Turkish falafel, and Roman-Jewish food; they saw Michaelangelo's Moses at San Pietro in Vincoli, as well as an amazing amount of Renaissance art in the various churches they wandered into; they explored the surprisingly diverse collections at the Vatican Museums (including, of course, the Sistine Chapel); and they managed to sneak into St. Peter's Basilica for Christmas Eve Midnight Mass! Finally, they boarded a train to Venice. Because of train delays, they unfortunately missed a Tuscan wine tour that was supposed to take place between Rome and Venice, but despite this they experienced plenty of delicious Italian wines. Their bed and breakfast in Venice was actually on the mainland in a rural area, a 30-minute bus ride followed by a 10-minute bicycle ride from Venice. The distance was more than made up for by their host, an extremely hospitable and knowledgeable woman who was able to point out many inexpensive, authentic restaurant choices in Venice. They had a wonderful time on the island, browsing historical museums, window-shopping for Murano glass, and stopping here and there for a bite of food and a glass of wine. St. Mark's was equal parts amazing and crowded, but despite the touristy feel, they were still blown away by the intricate sculpture and mosaic work. They just happened to wander by the Peggy Guggenheim collections one afternoon, and it turned out to be the most extensive collection of modern art either of them had ever seen. It surprised them that the Venetian Ghetto, despite originating the term, today has only remnants left of Jewish culture. They ended their honeymoon with a delicious, authentic meal of pizza and fresh gnocchi at a local restaurant in the town where they were staying. All in all, it was a wonderful, memorable, once-in-a-lifetime trip, and they are so thankful to everyone who supported them both emotionally and financially.

Sunday, Jan. 9. Epiphany Sunday, was a special service when new Bibles, a gift from an anonymous donor, were presented to the congregation. Tom and Martin coordinated the dedication of the new Bibles and the giving thanks for the old Bibles with the children's sermon. The dozen children (!) were drafted to pick up the old Bibles and deliver the new Bibles to folks in the pews. On Sunday the 16th, the children were also called upon to help by forming a circle of commissioning and blessing around **Beth Gleason, Cindy Lott, Liz and Becky Nash, and Felicia Scott**. The 5 women were going to El Salvador to work on a service project from Jan. 22--Jan. 29th. (photo at the end of the on-line Visitor)

Cathy Hubbs' daughter **Laura** negotiated a post-Christmas escape to Austin and visited with us all on Sunday, January 2. Sara and a newly energized Dave Ross were able to drive Cathy to church and leave Laura with the car. Laura is Eastern Orthodox and was thus able to drive Cathy's car down to St. Elias for early communion and still be on time to join us all in celebrating Christmas at the Congregational Church. Cathy and Laura say thank you, Sara! (see photo at the end of the on-line Visitor)

Doyal and Tommie Pinkard welcomed son Chris, his wife Rizza, and their six year old, Kiana, for the Christmas holidays. They enjoyed decorating the Christmas tree, swirling under the Zilker Park tree, and other activities of the season during their ten-day visit. They missed grandson Gabriel, who spent Christmas with his mother in California, and son David and Suzanne, who are awaiting the birth of their first child in New York. Their next news will be about their February visit to greet their new granddaughter.

Ben White spent the pre-Christmas week in Akumal, Mexico, with his son Carl and family. Grandson David, who is a field engineer for a solar company in Santa Clara, CA, installed a solar unit in a ranch near Cancun on his way to the get-together. Grandson Evan is a sophomore in CalArts (California School of the Arts) majoring in jazz, emphasizing saxophones. Carl's friend Chris Ruud and he were seatmates in 6th grade at Casis Elementary, were classmates at Baylor Medical School, and their families have vacationed together frequently in recent years, including this past Christmas week, 2010. Ben wound up in Houston with Christmas dinner with his cousins, in San Angelo for a visit with his sister Pat and her family, and to Fredericksburg for New Year's dinner with brother Jack and family, including TV viewing of TCU's Rose Bowl football victory over Wisconsin.

Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers spent Christmas week on Kauai with son, Rob Carruthers, and family. They flew from Austin to Lihue on December 19th. The first stop after landing was to Costco for food and gas and on to Safeway for things not found at Costco! Their rented house on the North Shore near Princeville, came with the famous Kauai roosters and a salt water swimming pool. It rained the first of the week, but the remainder of the week was nice enough for swimming and boogie boarding. In a rented 7 person minivan with drivers, Rob and wife Sandra, Marilyn and George went to the NW end of Highway 56 - Ke'e Beach - Park-Na Pali, back to Hanalei Bay, Anini Beach, Kilauea Lighthouse,

and the NaAina Kai Botanical Gardens. On other days, they viewed Opaeka'a Falls-Wailua, did some swimming and picnicking at Nawil'wili Harbor, took a helicopter ride over Mt.Wai'ale'ale (the wettest spot on Earth-average 428 inches of rain), Waimea Canyon, and the Na Pali Coastline. Another day, they drove up Waimea Canyon and savored "shave ice" at Waimea on their way home. Everyone enjoyed the Luau and Show at Smith's Tropical Paradise on Christmas Eve. On the 26th, with time to spare in Honolulu, some members of the family visited the USS Arizona Memorial. Having seen the memorial before, Marilyn and George walked through the Pacific Aviation Museum on Ford Island, Pearl Harbor. The family agreed that Kauai was expensive but the beauty of the Garden Island was well worth it! Also, it was a very special vacation spending quality time with family, especially grandchildren Jonathan - 13 in February, and Allison - 16 in April.

The Church Ladies will be spelling again at the Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee in April. The team has to raise \$1500 to enter, so will begin soliciting funds as soon as possible. Pat Oakes of Austin Congregational and Laurel Stoddard and Susan Richter of Central Presbyterian will be hard at work learning hundreds and hundreds of words. The money raised from the Bee goes to benefit the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas. It should be noted here that 1 of every 5 central Texans is functionally illiterate, so there is a lot of work to do.

Rich (our interim pastor between Yoshi and Tom--and retired pastor from Central Presbyterian Church) **and Jane Thompson** are pleased to report some family news. They were away in Thailand for a month between Thanksgiving and Christmas, having gone for Rich's son Mark's wedding to a very lovely Thai woman who works for the Foreign Service. So while there they traveled the country, including to Chaign Mai and its nearby elephant camp! (see photos at the end of the on-line Visitor) Also, Rich recently presented a talk at a Sunday morning Adult Forum at Plymouth Congregational Church in Fort Collins, CO (where they now live) on the subject of Genealogy and Spirituality. (photo at the end of the on-line Visitor)

Former members and still friends of the church, **Steven and Jeanine Neuse** got back on Jan. 7th from a cruise through the Panama Canal. They left on Dec. 19th for San Francisco and departed on the tour on the 20th on the Regent Seven Seas Cruise ship. They had seven stops with land excursions along the way. The food, lecture sessions, passengers, etc., were great. They were glad to get back home to Fayetteville, AR, after a wonderful trip.

Mel and Pat Oakes are delighted to announce the marriage of their daughter Sarah Hartley Oakes to Michael Joseph (Joe) Pierce on Wednesday, December 29th, 2010, at 3 p.m. in the afternoon in Arlington, VA. Sarah and Joe had been talking about marriage for some time, but decided that the time was really right when they found their perfect house in Arlington--right across from the East Falls Church metro station. The final papers on the house were signed on Jan. 19 and they started moving in after that (from Reston and Bethesda). They wanted a low-key ceremony--the date was set only the week before the wedding. Joe's parents, Dick and Nancy

Pierce (whom Pat and Mel met the last time they were in D.C.) and his two brothers were there (Joe's family lives in the D.C. area--although his brother Rich drove 2 hours each way for a very short ceremony!). The Oakes family would have loved to have been there--but then it would not have been a small ceremony! Instead, Beth, Mardie, and Pat and Mel talked on the phone at the time of the wedding--and Sarah and Joe called them immediately after. There will be a small family celebration in late May in their new home when the immediate family will come--and, of course, there will be a celebration at Pat's family reunion in July. Joe, a construction lawyer, is the middle of 3 boys as Sarah is the middle of three girls. His dad was born in Scituate where many of Pat's family come from. Sarah is keeping her name and Joe is keeping his! Their new address is Oakes/Pierce, 6433 Washington Blvd, Arlington, VA 22205. (see photo at the end of the on-line Visitor).

Billy Brent Malkus of the Texas Sapphires doesn't make it to church very often. His schedule tells you why. They play in a number of venues around Texas--often on Saturday nights which makes Sunday morning church a bit of a problem. They recently played at Gruene Hall. The group has been to Arizona to play a number of times, have enjoyed the beautiful state, and have always encountered the best of folks there. Arizona's crown jewel (with all apologies to the Grand Canyon), Organ Pipe National Monument, is one of the most enchanting places on Earth. says Brent. The group plays almost every Tuesday evening for Happy Hour at The Hole In The Wall. They are looking forward to a European tour including Norway and France in July.

This just in from **Elizabeth Freese** about her husband's new music. **Talley Summerlin** has just released a digital single, his first new material since his band, BE, released their final album in 2001, and his first solo music ever. It is called "Alright With You." He recorded it in Austin with Andy Sharp, who has engineered and produced with Sheryl Crow, Spoon, Blue October and others. Andy also added bass and piano to the track. Percussionist/drummer Chris Searles (Shawn Colvin, Twang Twang Shock-A-Boom, Amy Cook, Ian Moore) played drums. Talley's brother, Mark, guitarist and music director for Seal, contributed some backing guitar. You can listen to it on his website (<http://www.talleysummerlin.com>) and at MySpace <http://www.myspace.com/talleysummerlin>). For those of you who do the Facebook thing, you should "like" his Artist Page at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Talley-Summerlin/175756085777455>. **But, most importantly, you can buy it here: http://www.reverbnation.com/store/artist_971477**. He has dozens of other songs in the works, and by supporting this first one he can record/produce those and get them out as well - so, spread the word!

Ricky and Monica Masters are the proud parents of new baby girl, Agnes Jeanette Masters, born on January 26th in Austin. The baby is the granddaughter (and first grandchild) of Danny and Mary Towery Masters in Georgetown and the great-granddaughter of pastor emeritus John and Eleanor Towery. Monica was in labor for 24 hours before they did a C-section at 3 a.m. in the morning. Agnes weighed 8 pounds and 5 ounces and

was 21 3/4 inches long. Agnes (grandmother Mary's middle name) arrived with a head of sandy hair. Mother and child were both doing fine!

BRAZOS ASSOCIATION NEWS

On Thursday, January 13th, several of our Brazos Association ministers heard a presentation from Steve Miller on how the Red Cross can help us prepare to help ourselves and others in a disaster. Steve has been the chair of the Brenham Area Red Cross. He is also a member of St. John's UCC in Burton and husband of Cindy Miller, one of our Association Licensed Ministers. Specifically, Steve focused on how churches can shelter people who need a place to stay during and after a disaster. The Red Cross can help our churches become Red Cross shelters through their guidance, training, and support. St. John's has recently gone through this process, becoming what is known as a pass through shelter for people heading through the area that need a very short term place to stay. The training is useful and a very reasonable time commitment. Red Cross can also provide some support for those places who are sheltering people but have not gone through the process of becoming a Red Cross Shelter (as St. John's has done in the past).

As we all know, people fled in the directions of all of our Association churches before Hurricane Rita, and both before and after Hurricane Ike. We had many people in our communities during and after Katrina. In addition, people in the Lyons, Gay Hill, and Washington churches were in an area with substantial power outages after Ike. Of course, living in Texas we all know that tornadoes and floods put people in need of help very quickly. As churches, we can reach out in compassion to provide help and shelter if we are prepared. I invite all of our Association churches to consider how we can get ready to help: perhaps in preparing to reach out to those in our own communities, to those fleeing another area from UCC churches, or to whoever is passing through and needs help. If any of our churches would like to accept this invitation, I invite you to contact me to let me know. I am willing to help you think through what you can do.

The discussion during our Jam and Bread meeting included how we can work among our own congregations during a disaster. Do we have a systematic way to check on people who might be home-bound or most vulnerable? Can we encourage our people to have good supplies available to "tide them over" or help keep them safe? As communities of faith and support, we can talk about our own congregations about how to prepare for disasters that are likely to occur where people in our churches live.

In our ongoing Association life, we have several pastors and students in our Association to lift up in prayer: Nikki Williams Stahl, one of our in care students, on the recent birth of baby daughter Emmalee Ruth Sumi Stahl; Kyle Walker, campus minister at Texas A&M, on the death of his father; Dan DeLeon, pastor of Friends Congregational Church, College Station, as he goes on leave

for the month of February to be able to finish his Doctor of Ministry work; and Mary Wilson, pastor of Church of the Savior, Austin, as she continues to recover from her concussion and from recent inner ear surgery.

Finally, I invite you to plan to join us at our Brazos Association Spring meeting, Sunday, May 1 beginning at 3 pm. St. John's, Burton, will be the host, and we will share dinner together afterward.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Brazos Association Minister



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

4	Jonathan Carruthers	16	Mathis Blackstock
	Megan Goff		Nancy C. Brown
6	Mardie Oakes		Betty James
	Holly Ann Horner	17	John Horner
	Gail Christeson		John Moore
7	Geneva Ross	18	Ned Murphy
8	Barbara Burnham	19	Jamie Adams
	Lois Drachenberg	20	Whit Bodman
11	Valentino Herrera	26	Ida M. Little
13	Richard Jackson	29	Martha Wilding

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for March VISITOR — February 21

We are changing the way we do refreshments for fellowship hour



FELLOWSHIP HOUR HOSTS:

We are changing the way we do refreshments for fellowship hour. There will be two sign-ups instead of one. One will be to sign up to bring "goodies" and the other will be to clean up. "Goodies" should be just a little snack to go with coffee and punch. This does NOT need to be elaborate. Please consider signing-up to clean-up, it will help tremendously and won't take long if the "goodies" are modest. Thank you!