

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

I recently read an article in the journal *Foreign Policy* entitled “The Y Article, The Pentagon’s Secret Plan to Slash its Own Budget,” by John Norris. It turns out that two senior members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff published a document in April entitled “A National Strategic Narrative.” In the document, the authors argue the United States is placing too much emphasis on the military and too little emphasis on the education and social development of our young people. They claim our nation’s preoccupation with Islamic extremism and our tendency to seek military solutions to some of the world’s most complex issues are misguided, and that we must shift our priorities and focus more attention on the education and well-being of our nation’s youth.

These two senior members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff write:

By investing energy, talent, and dollars now in the education and training of young Americans—the scientists, statesman, industrialists, farmers, inventors, educators, clergy, artists, service members, and parents, of tomorrow—we are truly investing in our ability to successfully compete in, and influence, the strategic environment of the future. Our first investment priority, then, is intellectual capital and a sustainable infrastructure of education, health, and social services to provide for the continuing development and growth of America’s youth.

As John Norris reminds us, this report was not written by the Sierra Club, but by two of our nation’s top military strategists. And it was written at a time when the very priorities they argue we must lift up and strengthen are being decimated by our national legislators in Washington, and by state legislators and city councils all across our nation. We’re investing less energy, talent, and dollars into the education and social development of our nation’s youth—our own future. Rather than prioritizing a sustainable infrastructure of education, health, and social services for all of America’s youth, we’re dismantling this infrastructure for too many of them.

In other words, we’re leaving many of our nation’s youth behind. We’re relinquishing our responsibility to them. Or to paraphrase Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel, spoken to his disciples before his crucifixion, we’re leaving them bereft. In John’s Gospel, Jesus reassures his disciples right before his death that he will not disappear and leave them to fend for themselves. I’ll come back, he tells them, even after my death, to be with you again. And then, when I return to the heavenly realm to be with God, I’ll send someone else to be with you, an Advocate who’ll guide you and stick by your side no matter what. The reassurance that Christ will never abandon his community of disciples lays in stark contrast to the story of the crucifixion in the gospels, where the disciples abandon Christ once it becomes too dangerous to follow him.

I will not leave you bereft. These words illustrate the infinite depth of Christ’s love for us, and the absolute fidelity of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to remain in relationship with us no matter what, even when we turn and run from God, Christ, and the Spirit. The Gospels teach us that we’re called to embody the very same depth of fidelity and love in our lives as that expressed by God, Christ, and the Spirit. Even though it may be an impossible ideal for us, given our human weakness, self-centeredness, greed, confusion, and fear, it is nevertheless our divine calling and deepest aspiration as Christ’s disciples to embody the unconditional love and absolute faith of God, Christ, and the Spirit in our own lives—to God and to one another.

And let us not forget that Christ calls us to love and remain faithful to the poor, the outcast, the vulnerable, and all children. When you feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and visit the sick, you feed me, give me water, and visit me,

Christ tells us. But if you disregard the hungry, the thirsty, and the sick, then you disregard and abandon me. And let the children come to me, but woe to anyone who becomes a stumbling block to just one of them.

Our church's ministry to homeless street kids is a powerful embodiment of Christ's call to love and remain faithful to those who are vulnerable and suffering. In the face of some in our West Campus neighborhood who'd like to drive all these kids out of our neighborhood, our church refuses to abandon them and continues to serve them by providing food, water, medical services, and a place to rest.

But as a few top generals have warned, we're abandoning and leaving bereft a whole generation of children as we dismantle the educational and social development infrastructures that are needed to support our nation's families and to raise our nation's children in ways that enable them to bloom with all their God-given potential. And rest assured, the more we dismantle the educational and social development infrastructures that we need to support families and raise children in our city, state, and nation, the more kids we're going to see outside our church drinking from our water spigot and waiting to come inside for a couch to sit on and bologna sandwich to eat.

We cannot leave them bereft. Any of them.

We have our work cut out for us.

TOM

Caring Family Network (CFN) is a private non-profit child placing (foster care and adoption) agency licensed by the State of Texas. Through extraordinary work, dedication, and commitment by our licensed foster parents and experienced treatment teams, we provide therapeutic services to nearly 400 abused and neglected children. We have offices in Austin, Kerrville and Brownwood and families all over Central and East Texas .

Central Texas is in need of more foster homes to provide care for this vulnerable population. Currently in Travis County, there are 416 children in foster care 60.6% of those children were placed out of county due to there not being enough foster homes available in Travis County. In Williamson County, there are 212 children in foster care

What does this mean? This means a child in foster care is not only taken from their parents they are taken from their friends, school, and city they live in. This can also delay DFPS ability to reunify families.

Please join us on June 21, 2011 from 6-7 pm to learn more who we are and how you can help by becoming a foster/adoptive parent. Our address is 1812 Centre Creek Drive, Suite 200, Austin. Refreshments will be provided.

For more information contact:
Sarah M. Gomez, Community Relations
Caring Family Network
Office 512-719-3222
Direct 512-906-3834
sgomez@cfntexas.com



CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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For a wonderful graduation celebration

Alex, Tom, and Robin wish to thank the entire church for the wonderful celebration of Alex's graduation from Anderson High School that was held on Sunday, May 29. From the special music that Nodie, Norma, and Amy offered, to Joe's presentation, to the cake, hugs, gifts, and all the "congratulations," it was a wonderful time. Thanks so much for all your love and support! After a summer of travel and relaxation, Alex will be hitting the books down at Trinity University in San Antonio while Tom and Robin adjust to a whole new life.

PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

On Sunday, May 22, Barbara Burnham delighted the congregation when she announced that her employer was transferring her from Victoria back to Austin, and giving her a raise. She's very happy with these developments. So are we!!

Florence Castle celebrated her 95th birthday on May 13th and there was a party on the 14th at the Summit near



Florence played the piano at her party, of course.

Zilker Park. This is the facility where Florence stayed for nearly a month while recuperating from a sick spell. Several church members were in attendance as were her son **Paul** and friends from Florence's neighborhood where she has lived since 1940! Nodie wrote one of her great songs to mark the occasion. She is now enjoying being at home and has home health folks coming by to check on her. Still in the works is a summer celebration at the church for Florence.

Aaron Carter-Cohn, our former church pianist, was delighted to see **Pat and Mel Oakes** and **Nodie and Dennis Murphy** at his concert on April 3 in San Antonio. Since then some exciting things have happened to Aaron. After the performance of his compositions "Storm Front" and "Midnight" on April 3rd, he received three new commissions. "A Chorister's Prayer" was composed for the St. Luke's Parish Choir's tour of England this summer and will be performed at Canterbury Cathedral. "The Prayer of St. Francis" was performed at the 50th Anniversary of St. Francis Episcopal Church on May 15. The Texas Children's Choir has commissioned a work to be performed at a Children's Choir Festival at Carnegie Hall in 2012 (the text is to be decided).

Aaron graduated with his master's in choral conducting from UTSA in May. He has been filming two documentaries on music in immigrant and refugee communities in

Texas for the past year: "Texas celebrates Fifty Years of Nigerian Independence" and "At Home With Music: Burundian Refugees in America." These will be screened for the first time at Festival 500 (an annual choral festival) and the International Council of Traditional Music 2011 World Conference (a branch of UNESCO) this July in St. John's, Newfoundland. After visiting his family in Cleveland, he will depart for Nigeria (if he can finish raising the funds). There, he will intern as the organist at the Cathedral Church of Christ in Lagos (Cathedral of the Anglican Archdiocese--a post formerly held by Albert Schweitzer), assist **Sir Emeka Nwokedi** (the foremost choir director in Nigeria) at the Musical Society of Nigeria's Diploma Program, and study the Igbo and Yoruba languages/teach music at the University of Lagos (one of five federal universities in Nigeria). If anyone is interested in making a tax-deductible donation to this cause they can contact him at cartercohn@gmail.com. Aaron looks forward to sending Nodie transcriptions and arrangements of choral music from Africa!

Alex VandeStadt graduated from Anderson High School on June 4th, 2011. The church celebrated this great occasion with a party after church on May 29. After much thought and consideration, Alex will be at Trinity in San Antonio next fall. Many of us have seen Alex grow from a little girl into a lovely young woman. Congratulations, Alex. You are surrounded by good will and good wishes from all of us! (photo)

Our wonderful Sunday school teacher **Robin Heymans** just moved into a new apartment off of Oltorf- her first place all to herself and she loves it. Also, two sisters and their fairly new babies flew in from North Carolina and Chicago for their younger sister's graduation from St. Edward's University. It was lots of fun to have her new niece and nephew together for the first time.

Eliot Scott was accepted to do a paid internship working in the outskirts of D.C. for the National Anthropological Archives Smithsonian Institution Museum Support Center <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/index.htm>. He left at the end of May and began working for 8 weeks with them. **Felicia** will stay in Austin for June as **Skye** attends YMCA camps and the Amala Foundation camp. Eliot will fly back to Austin for Skye's 5th birthday party (her birthday is July 4th) and they will all drive to Maryland on July 9th and the kids and Felicia will stay 3 to 4 weeks to spend time with Eliot's father and stepmother (seeing Eliot on the weekends) and hopefully spend time on the coast. They are happy to be going to a cooler climate for some of the hottest days of Texas summer and to get to attend Eliot's father's UCC church where he is the minister. As an added bonus, Skye and Sterling will attend Vacation Bible School while they are there. **Felicia** is hoping get to speak

at the church about the El Salvador mission trip that she went on with folks from our church. Since she is still looking for work here in Austin, they thought it would be great to take the opportunity and have a little vacation too. They will return to Austin at the beginning of August for Eliot to start back at UT for one more year and Skye to attend kindergarten at Brentwood Elementary.

Mary and Matt Blackstock had a very pleasant 5 days in Las Vegas, New Mexico, attending an Elderhostel (now known as Road Scholars) on the history of that area. The presenters were generally well-informed and helpful. Las Vegas was the largest and most important city in the state in the late 1800s because of commerce and transportation. They eventually lost out because of having been circumvented by the railroad.

Paul Deisler reports that his wife Ellen is now under hospice care at their retirement center in Corpus. She sleeps much of the time, but occasionally will wake up and say a few words. Recently she looked at Paul and said, "You're wonderful!" Paul had vein surgery on his right leg since the same surgery on his left was very successful. He continues to read science and write letters to the editor. Family members visit periodically, including their son and grandchildren from Austin and many visits from their recently widowed daughter Jane, who also lives in Corpus.

The Church Ladies did not do as well as they would have liked in the Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee. They went down relatively early on a word they had never heard of--and one that was not pronounced correctly. The word was "absquatulate" (but it was pronounced "obsquatulate"--sigh)--meaning to decamp, to leave. However, the team really did win--they raised more than \$2200 to go toward literacy efforts in Central Texas. Many thanks to all of the wonderful folks at the two churches who helped raise funds for the team!!!

Here is a big news flash from **Pam Tucker**. After many decades of soccer, she is finally retiring and leaving it to the kids to play. She says, "It has been great fun over the years, and difficult to admit that 'I'm too old for this,' but the time has come." Savanna and Harrison will be attending a sports camp at Southwestern University in early June where they will be trying out many different sports. Harrison has started piano lessons and is learning fast and enjoying it.

Debbie Appel Knowlton notes how proud her late mother Jean would have been of her grandchildren **Katie and Jake Appel**, children of Debbie's brother Greg. Her niece, Katie, graduated from Texas A&M University, and her nephew, Jake, graduated from his high school in Kerrville. Katie plans to pursue a career in elementary school education, and Jake plans on attending

Southwest Texas University in San Marcos. Not only is Debbie very proud of them, but so are **Vic and Betty** as well.

Mel and Pat Oakes had a fabulous time on their recent 16 day Road Scholar trip to Turkey. They started in Ankara and ended up in Istanbul with stops in Konya, Antalya, Ephesus, Troy, and Gallipoli, among many others. Their group and guide were terrific and the sights/sites were outstanding. Pat felt like she was walking through her 6th grade social studies textbook from which she taught for many years! Unfortunately, both Pat and Mel got sick--bringing home an upper respiratory souvenir from Turkey to their daughter Sarah's in Arlington, VA. Fortunately, no one else got sick. They stayed there for 10 days resting and getting ready for the big Memorial Da weekend celebration of Sarah and Joe's marriage which took place on Dec. 29th. The whole family was there as



Mel and Pat Oakes at Topkapi Palace in Istanbul the day after their 48th wedding anniversary.

were many friends of Sarah and Joe's. It was a great joy for Pat to make them a wedding cake for the celebration in the park. Pat's more extended family will celebrate with Sarah and Joe at the Winter/Brown family reunion in NC in July. (see photo on p. 5)

Juliet Quisenberry does not have her mother climbing the walls, but Juliet loves to do so. She is quite the gymnast! She and her twin sister Scarlett just turned 5 years old.



BRAZOS ASSOCIATION NEWS

by Liz Nash

We are currently looking for anyone in the Brazos Association interested in Licensed Ministry training. A group of three people who want to begin Licensed Ministry classes met with **Glen Schoeneberg**, **Douglas Anders**, and me during dinner at our May 1st Brazos Association Meeting. This group would like to get started as soon as possible on the set of courses which would meet approximately monthly over the next year and a half to two years.

These classes will help prepare candidates for Licensed Ministry in the UCC (as a member of a UCC church), and we welcome, too, those in our churches who want more in-depth classes in areas that we cover. We also invite members of churches from South Central Conference Associations to join us. Contact me (lizknash@gmail.com or 512-799-2782) as soon as possible if you or someone you know is interested.

St. John's UCC, Burton hosted our May 1st Brazos Association meeting. Representatives from twelve of our thirteen association churches joined together for worship, fellowship, sharing from the churches, a business meeting, dinner, and a program led by **Kyle Walker**, Campus Minister for United Campus Ministries at Texas A&M. We are grateful for the hospitality St. John's extends in so many ways.

We honored two of our Brazos Association ministers, **Dan DeLeon** and **Kyle Walker**, as they have completed their Doctor of Ministry degrees this spring. Dan received his degree during the Brite Divinity School ceremony at Texas Christian University's graduation exercises in Fort Worth on Saturday, May 7. Kyle received his degree from Columbia Theological Seminary during their graduation ceremony at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia on May 14. Both Dan and Kyle did thesis work that springs from and enhances their respective ministries, as well extensive course work. Both have also shared from their doctoral work with our Association ministers at our monthly Jam and Bread gatherings. They join a number of other Brazos Association ministers who have done challenging work on a doctoral degree that enriches their ministry. It is a real joy to be able to say that we can now call them **Rev. Dr. Dan DeLeon** and **Rev. Dr. Kyle Walker**.

During the program at our meeting, **Kyle** shared from his doctoral work, which explored why many young adults who share the values of our churches do not participate and what does attract young adults to our churches. He found that some ideas we have about young adults and church are not necessarily true. For instance, worship services with praise music or other contemporary formats often actually appeal to an older age group rather than to this one, and the thought that young adults will come to church once they have kids is not necessarily true. Instead, Kyle found that young adults want us to be genuine and sincerely who we are as churches in our worship. I think this last observation is good news: an affirmation that the best ministry we can have is to follow from the heart God's calling in our lives together as churches.

The sharing from our churches is always a highlight of our Association Meeting. We heard about a playground being built, a church forum on Islam, a wonderful Youth Sunday, a study of human trafficking, and much more. We renew our covenant together and lift each other up when we share. We are indeed a United church as we continue this work, and I am thankful for the ministry of all of our churches.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash

Brazos Association Minister

PERSONALS



Post wedding celebration photo at Lacey Woods Park in Arlington, Virginia. From left: Mel Oakes, Sarah Oakes, Joe Pierce, Nancy Pierce (Dick, Joe's dad, was at the playground with grandkids), Mardie Oakes, Tony Deifell, Beth Oakes, Eugene Buck, Pat Oakes

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for July VISITOR — June21

2011-2012 Directory Updates

We are in the process of updating the church directory, and Kathy Whatley needs your help. Please check the clipboard in the Fellowship Hall that contains everyone's current listing in the directory. If you've moved, changed an e-mail address, etc, we need your current information. Also, some of the information in the current directory may be wrong due to misspellings or mixed up numbers. Just check your directory listing and provide updated, correct information next to your name. If there are no changes, please put a checkmark next to your listing.

There is space on the last two pages for new members to add their information. If you have questions, or need to e-mail new information, send it to Kathy's attention at ucausti@swbell.net. Thanks!

So Long, Farewell, Emily!

We are sad to say goodbye to our wonderful nursery worker, **Ms. Emily Everidge**, who has been with us over the past year. Emily has received a contract for summer acting work in New Hampshire for July and August and her last day with us will be on June 26th. Emily's plans currently involve a move up north after the summer.

We wish this talented young lady the best and thank her for taking such good care of our children. Keep in touch, Emily!