

THE VISITOR



The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

On August 15, those of us able gathered after worship to discuss how to respond to the homeless young people and their night-time activities on our church property. Their night-time activities included eating, sleeping, finding spots to relieve themselves because there are no public restrooms in our neighborhood, smoking pot, injecting heroin, selling drugs, drinking alcohol, getting into fights, and causing property damage. That's not to say *all* of this was happening every night, but on any given night any combination of these activities were occurring. Eating, sleeping, finding places to "go to the bathroom," and drug and alcohol use were common just about every night. Conflicts resulting in acts of violence were less common but occurred. And over the summer, we had two occasions where someone threw a rock that hit a window, and someone destroyed our children's garden.

In my reflection prior to our congregational discussion, I shared how it breaks my heart to see young people in our courtyard, and I offered the following imaginative exercise:

"Try this yourself. Picture an adorable innocent newborn. A cute little baby. So full of potential. And then a toddler. Crawling around in his or her diaper. Curious. Pulling him or herself up and tottering on two fat shaky little legs. Falling back down on his or her butt and laughing. Bright-eyed. Big smile. The first step. A few weeks later running everywhere. And then suddenly a young child. A pre-schooler. Then a kindergartener. Elementary school. And then middle school. Pre-teen. A teen-ager, with all the accelerated growth, pressure, expectations, and confusion a typical teenager even in a well-adjusted home struggles with.

But then I'm haunted by the question, what happened to that child? Why is that child living in our courtyard? Why is that child eating out of cans and sleeping on a piece of cardboard instead of eating at the family dinner table and sleeping in his or her bed? Why is that child shooting heroin into his or her vein? Why is that child so angry, or emotionally unstable, or scary looking, or scared? Why is that child so darn nice and polite and helpful, yet living in our courtyard?

What happened to that baby, that toddler, that pre-schooler, that third-grader, that pre-teen? *Something* happened. Something so profound, so hurtful, so deeply wounding, so disruptive, so traumatic that this child ended up on the street. And in our courtyard.

What was it? Was this child, this infant, this toddler, this third-grader, this pre-teen abused in some way? Most likely, yes.

Emotional abuse? Physical abuse? Sexual abuse? Probably.

The family into which he or she was born, was it deeply dysfunctional? Same answer.

There's a tremendous history of suffering in those lives in our courtyard, and "society" compounds that suffering by judging their looks and their behavior, their emotional and mental state, and their survival strategies in a harsh and negative manner. Society compounds that suffering by wanting little to do with them, by providing totally inadequate help, by wishing they would just disappear.

So while it's difficult to discern just how to respond to the situation in our courtyard in a Christ-like manner, I can tell you this with absolute certainty, just wishing homeless youth and young adults would disappear is not a Christ-like response."

A Christ-like response. As I also noted in my reflection, sometimes it's very difficult to discern what constitutes a Christ-like response. Exactly how to show love and compassion is not always clear, especially when one must consider the needs of diverse groups of people. Can we just prohibit homeless people from our property? Where will they sleep? What about when it rains? And what about the needles we're finding in our garden? What if one of our children picks one up? What if someone is seriously injured in a fight?

In the end, we decided we had to prohibit the night-time activity, at least for now, with the one exception that on rainy nights people can seek shelter under our covered porch. But we also committed ourselves to press the neighborhood and the city to better meet the unmet needs of the homeless young people in our neighborhood. I raised this issue with the senior pastors of the University-area churches at a recent meeting, and Rev. Larry Bethune volunteered to host a summit of all the area churches to further discuss how our churches can more effectively address this issue. I also discussed this

issue with Doug Greco, Lead Organizer for Austin Interfaith, and he told me several AI churches are dealing with the issue of homelessness and housing, and that this could become an Austin Interfaith issue. Hopefully this is a start.

I want to thank each and every one of you who participated in this lengthy discussion—those who participated in the big neighborhood meeting at our church, those who participated in the smaller meetings we’ve had with Lifeworks, Charles Locklin, and the Austin Police Department, and those who participated in the congregational discussion and the many e-mail discussions we’ve had. I think we’ve truly struggled with this in a Christ-like manner—with love, wisdom, and a sincere passion to respond to the human suffering right outside our door. Let us now press on in a Christ-like manner.

Tom

OUTREACH BOARD

INITIATES A SERIES OF JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC FORUMS

Our church's members are well aware of injustices in our immigrant, homeless, and worker communities, but may not be well informed on the need for reforms in Texas jails and prisons. The Outreach Board will highlight this area in the first of three meetings scheduled this school year. Three speakers will tell us about actions that we can take as individuals or as a church to support reform in the penal system and abolition of private prisons and the death penalty. Please join us after church on September 19 at 12:30.

http://congregational.faithweb.com/cca/outreach_19sep10.pdf

Look for announcements for the other meetings in January (on homelessness) and April (about the Equal Justice Center).

GOING INTERNATIONAL....

Many of you attended church the day that Rev Liz Nash spoke to us about her trip to El Salvador. Now the rest of us in the UCC's South Central Conference are invited to participate in the next work-study trip scheduled for January 22-29, 2011. We will help -- financially and physically -- to build a water containment system in Alegria, a remote mountain village. Leadership will come from Rev Tom Neilsen, a UCC pastor who has taken Wisconsin Conference churches to the area many times, as well as Liz and Rev John Sumner of St Peter's Church of Coupland. Cost per person is estimated to be \$800 for transportation, food, and lodging and we will be asked to join other area churches in raising \$2500 for the project. Our rewards will be learning about the culture and courage of people who have survived years of civil war and poverty and the opportunity to share their stories. For more details please contact Rev Nash.

ART FROM THE STREETS

Our involvement

We here at UCC have made a commitment to having exhibitions of art from homeless artists working at their new location at Trinity Center at the corner of 7th and Trinity with the group ART FROM THE STREETS which is a volunteer run organization that gives homeless artists a place to work and free materials to use.

Once a year, a two day show and sale is held. This year the dates are Nov 6 and 7, noon to 5 pm. This show has grown to be a major art event with a great variety of works produced by the contributing artists. All works are for sale and reasonably priced.

The contributing artists have often been stunned to find out that their works sell and that they get the total proceeds from any sales.

Here at UCC, the pieces in these changing exhibitions of works from previous years are also for sale.

I am happy to report that we have sold three pieces since we began early this year and that we have also had a request from Beth Gleason to see if she and Jane, a first time visitor --they bought a piece together - could sponsor the artist who did the Man in the Black Hat. (There is a story there. Ask Beth).

Church members have said they are glad we are taking on this project. The works are engaging and we know we are helping a segment of the homeless population.

I know. Bill and I have bought three small inexpensive pieces which we continue to enjoy.

Joan Mueller, coordinator of the UCC involvement.

COMING SOON

Our own showing of the documentary about the AFTS program. Watch for listing.

Chairs of our Boards

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

SEPTEMBER PERSONALS

by Pat Oakes

Marguerite Capps White died June 29, 2010, 5 days after her 59th wedding anniversary to her husband Ben. Other survivors are sons Carl and wife Sally Stabler and their sons David and Evan of Denver, and Cappy, his wife Lillian Salcido and daughter Maya of Davis, CA. Ben extends his thanks to Tom for conducting Marguerite's memorial service, to Tom and Cecile for their counsel, to the deacons for serving at the memorial and the reception, held on July 18 at the First Unitarian-Universalist Church, and to the Lemley family for supplying the memorial service programs. Both sons and all three grandchildren took part in the service. Marguerite's ashes were buried in a private gathering of relatives at Wagram Cemetery in Mason County, near where she grew up. The service had originally been set for our church, but so many people were planning to attend the celebration of Marguerite's life that it was moved to the Unitarian-Universalist church.

Fran and Rambie Briggs's trip to Central Europe was one of those different day, different country tours to Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Ask them about the details of sightseeing and accordion music. Now Rambie will have to put accordion playing on hold since he fell about 8 p.m. on Saturday evening, August 7th, and broke his left wrist. Recovery time is scheduled for 6 weeks. Grandson Giovanni Fracasso was with him in the garage when Rambie slipped in some water. Their air-conditioning unit had been leaking, and they have not been able to find out what's wrong. Stella and Giovanni accompanied Fran and Rambie to the E.R. and their dad Michael Fracasso picked them up. In mid-August, Fran reported that they were doing pretty well, but it is uncomfortable for Rambie.

In other OW! news, **Nodie Murphy** had her right knee replaced on Monday, Aug. 9. The arthroscopic surgery done about 3 months ago had not done the job, so the knee replacement was the next step. A number of members of the congregation have had similar surgeries so know how hard the recovery is and are offering encouragement and support. We look forward to seeing Nodie back leading the choir in the not too distant future. Nurse Dennis has been doing an outstanding job reports Nodie who is really looking forward to non-knee related conversations!

Jen Howicz's mother Margaret Snapp had her knee replaced by the same doctor earlier that same day. She is also recuperating and is doing quite well. She came to Austin from Rogers, Arkansas, to have the surgery and to be looked after by her daughter Jen who is now a skilled physical therapist. Jen's mom was in rehab for several weeks as the Howiczes' home only has a 1/2 bath downstairs and is a two story home--not helpful for someone with recent surgery. Jim continues to recover from his recent gastric by-pass surgery, has lost 75 pounds, and is feeling really good. Emily is a new freshman at the brand new Cedar Ridge High school in Round Rock and is playing the flute in the band. She shared a lovely worship gift with the congregation on Sunday, Aug. 15, by playing a beautiful Mendelssohn piece for us. Tess is in second grade at Forest Creek Elementary.

Church members had a wonderful surprise on Sun-

day, July 25, when **Lisa and Sarah Kirch** showed up for the service. They were visiting from Sheffield, AL, where Lisa is on the art history faculty at the University of Northern Alabama after a number of years here at our church. Sarah is 14 now--amazing!--and will be attending boarding school at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham this year. While they were in Austin, Michael Adams and Kerry Manning with daughter Julia took Lisa and Sarah to Georgetown for dinner at Dos Salsas, the best (according to Michael!) Mexican food in a five county area. A couple of nights later, Lisa and Sarah brought Doyal and Tommie Pinkard to dinner at Michael and Kerry's house, so Doyal and Tommie could see the grandkids, and so Sarah could see Jamie. They went with Julia to the park and shot arrows, losing one in the dusk. A good time was enjoyed by all. Lisa also enjoyed lunch at the Oakes' home with Dave and Sara Ross while Sarah reconnected with old friends here in town.

In mid-August, **Pam Tucker** and the family went to Colorado to their cabin one more time before school started. They have spent more time in the mountains this year than ever. In early August, Savanna went to Camp Braveheart for 3 days. It is an overnight camp put on by Hospice and is for children who have lost a loved one. They have lots of time to talk about it and ask questions about death and dying. Pam thinks Savanna had a good time, but she said that she didn't think that it was very helpful regarding her loss of Nancy, a colleague of Pam's and a dear family friend who died recently after a long struggle with cancer. Both Savanna and Harrison went to acting camp in mid-August. Harrison started kindergarten this year and Savanna is in 3rd grade. Pam also reports that she has hung up her soccer cleats and will only be team captain for one team this year. She says, "The knees have probably done all the soccer that they can handle."

Many members will remember **Jeri Winter** who graduated from UT several years ago and is now back in Illinois. She and her fiancé Ray Gradecki are the proud parents of Wylan Redford Gradecki born July 4th at 12:42pm, 7 pounds 9 ounces, 21 inches long. Other than being sleep-deprived, both Jeri and Ray are thoroughly enjoying being parents.

Sara Ross is the pleased owner of a new viola. She is a player in the Silver Strings Orchestra and found that they needed a violist. She has played the violin with the group for several years and decided she would like the challenge of branching out.

Don Miles was chatting with a young lady as he waited for the "Frontier Days" parade to start on July 27 in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Some older women asked if they could take their picture, and the girl put her arm around Don's waist. Naturally, Don reciprocated, and the ladies snapped away with their cameras and Don's. Now Don has a photo of Miss Wyoming and himself with their arms around each other. Don says, "Not bad for my age, but it doesn't happen like that every day."

Jim and Mona Maser missed a few Sundays at church in August--not because of Jim's foot problems which are now all better, but because Mona was in no shape to walk on those two weekends. She was having foot trouble with painful plantar fasciitis and couldn't get

around very well. So, rather than just stay home for those weekends, they took a little bit of a drive one weekend to Salado where they let the doggies swim in Salado Creek. They drove to Houston on the other Sunday and enjoyed the lovely countryside just beyond Bastrop, ate a good meal in Houston--and turned around and came home! Their dogs are getting acclimated to Texas. Brutus is the oldest (10 years old) a Chihuahua/Terrier mix. Brutus originally belonged to Jim's mother and when she passed away they brought him home. Chase is the middle one (7 years old) a German Shorthaired Pointer. Gus is the youngest (3 years old), a Brittany Spaniel and full of never ending energy running circles around the other two dogs. They have had Chase and Gus since they were puppies.

Retired former pastor **Yoshi Kaneda** reports that **Setsuko** has recovered very well from her stroke of last year. After Yoshi had to learn how to run the dishwasher and the washing machine, Setsuko is now glad to be doing the housework again--with Yoshi assisting with the heavier chores. She is still working on regaining her singing voice. Yoshi reports that they have just started Stephen Ministry at their church. They are lucky to have recruited six trainees, three men and three women, in their class. He is having a good time preparing and teaching. For this ministry Yoshi can even sacrifice his viewing time of Padres and Chargers games on TV.

Mel and Pat Oakes had a lovely, cool 12 day trip to Colorado in late June--early July. They met their 3 daughters, 2 sons-in-law and a significant other, and their two grandchildren at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park. They all enjoyed hiking, admiring hummingbirds, playing baseball, working on puzzles, and preparing delicious meals. Beth was also working at the Steamboat Springs Music Festival, so Pat and Mel joined Beth, Eugene, and Ethan and Emily there for a few days after their time in Estes Park was through. They then went on to visit Pat's long-time friend from junior high in Colorado Springs and then on to visit a cousin of Mel's in Boulder. It took a lot of willpower to get back on the plane to come home to the heat in Austin!

Whit Bodman spent a week in Iran in late July. For the first two days, he was the guest of a seminarian in Qom, city of a hundred seminaries and institutes of religious studies. He had formal conversations with Shi'i scholars and recorded three radio programs. In Tehran, he attended a conference on multiculturalism and gave a paper on the Qur'an with Ayatollah Hadavi Tehrani sitting to his left. He liked the paper - whew! Whit had great conversations with participants from all over the world and with Iranian graduate students, some of whom were quite willing to talk about politics, religion and America. They were warmly welcomed and hosted, though criticism of America and the West was quite clear.



SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 7 Marilyn Pickens | Reuel Nash |
| 8 Ava Jean Deisler | 22 Larbi Sennour |
| 9 Alessandra Herrera | Giovanni Fracasso |
| 10 Tamyra Isenberg | Stella Fracasso |
| Bill Phillips | 24 Allison Cole Stutz |
| 13 Seth Murphy | Mary Halladay |
| Chris Pinkard | 27 Rambie Briggs |
| 21 Ellen Deisler | |

AUSTIN INTERFAITH UPDATE

On August 8, at least 15 members and friends of the Congregational Church of Austin (CCA) participated in a "self accountability session" at San Jose Church at which national and local elected officials and candidates were present to see the packed assembly commit to trying to get 20,000 voters to the polls who support the Austin Interfaith (AIF) Agenda. Marilyn, Tommie, Doris and others played an active role in organizing the event and Tom and Doris were both among the AIF leaders who spoke at the assembly.

Approximately 10 CCA members are scheduled to convene with members from other AIF churches and organizations and other AIF-equivalent groups from around the state in San Antonio on August 28 for a "Get Out the Vote" action, with candidates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Comptroller attending. If you are interested in getting involved in the CCA's Get Out the Vote efforts, please contact Doris Williams at williams-doris@att.net, (512) 973-3299 Home, (512) 810-9561 Mobile.



CHOIR RESUMES PRACTICE

The choir will begin practice again on **September 5th** at 9:30 a.m. in the choir room. New members are always welcome; please contact Nodie at nodienice@gmail.com or 255-4602.

SUNDAY SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Our church Sunday School Breakfast will be held on Sunday, **September 12**, at 9:15 am. Come enjoy the company of our children along with breakfast tacos, juice, and coffee.

WHIT BODMAN'S TRIP TO IRAN

On Sunday, **September 12**, following worship, Rev. Dr. Whit Bodman will offer a program on his recent trip to Iran.

PRISONS, PROFITS & TEXAS DEATH ROW

The Board of Christian Outreach is hosting the forum Prisons, Profits & Texas Death Row on Sunday, **September 19**, from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. The speakers will include Diana Claitor, Director of the Texas Jail Project, Kirstin Houle, Executive Director of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, and Bob Libal, Organizer with Grassroots Leadership.

BRAZOS ASSOCIATION NEWS

Our Brazos Association Fall Meeting is coming up on Saturday, October 16th, 10 am to noon, at the Church of the Savior. Lunch will follow. At our meeting, we will celebrate and explore the partnerships many of our Association churches have with other denominations. About a third of our churches are affiliated across denominations: Church of the Savior with the Alliance of Baptists and American Baptists; United Christian and our new church start, Hope United, with the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ; and Rolling Hills with the Disciples, United Methodists, and Presbyterians. In addition, many of our ministers were ordained in these denominations, the United Campus Ministries at Texas A&M is an interdenominational ministry with students, and some of our churches have youth groups and community ministries in partnership with Disciples and other neighboring churches. The United Church of Christ has, as part of its identity from its founding, one of the strongest commitments of the American churches to these partnerships, and we are living this commitment in a significant way right here in our Association. We will share about how these partnerships work in our churches and among the wider churches. We will also take time to share news of our churches and enrich our fellowship as an Association. I hope you will join us on October 16th. You are all invited! Church of the Savior is located at 3402 Little Elm Trail in Cedar Park, about a block off of Highway 620 near Lakeline Mall. A map can be found on their website at <http://www.icots.org/>.

At our Church and Ministry Committee meeting last May, we voted to receive two more ministry students in-care of the Brazos Association: Beth Gleason and Martin Garrison. Both are members and in care students at Congregational Church of Austin and both are in the Master of Divinity program at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Beth has a M. A. in Theology from Seminary of the Southwest in Austin and is continuing her work to prepare for ministry. She plans to do her internship at Church of the Savior beginning next spring, with Rev. Mary Wilson as her supervisor. Martin was formerly one of the pastors of St. Thomas, a church start that discontinued its ministry last September. He decided to pursue ordination in the United Church of Christ and will be beginning his internship at Congregational Church this fall with Rev. Tom VandeStadt as his supervisor. I hope many of you will have the chance to meet Martin and Beth to welcome them to the Brazos Association. We are delighted to have them among us.

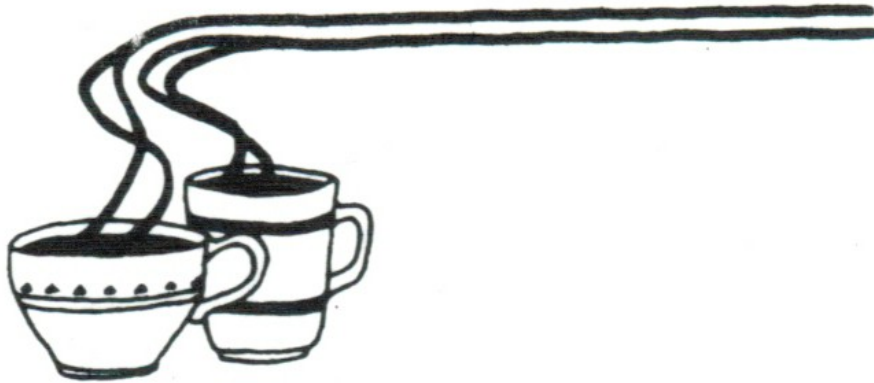
Blessings in Christ,

Liz Nash, Brazos Association Minister

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for October VISITOR — September 15



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.