

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin **United Church of Christ**

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

“OK then, I’ll just buy the darn thing so it won’t bug me anymore!”

This thought zipped through my mind as I sat on my meditation cushion trying to concentrate on my breath. The “darn thing” in question was a little turquoise colored lotus flower made of glass that I’d seen earlier in the day.

While participating in a week-long silent meditation retreat at **Spirit Rock Meditation Center**, I decided to visit the Center’s book store during a brief break one morning. Having been to Spirit Rock before, I knew the store was well-stocked with interesting works on Buddhism, meditation, and spirituality, as well as intriguing trinkets and paraphernalia such as Bodhisattva statues, incense burners, and singing bowls. While meandering through the store, a stack of little glass lotus flowers illuminated by sunlight from a nearby window caught my eye. Taking notice of the play of color and light but showing no real interest in the flowers themselves, I felt no desire to purchase one.

However, several hours later, while sitting on my cushion in the meditation hall, I was attacked by a powerful thought: I *must* have one of those little glass lotus flowers! An object that had no appeal for me earlier in the day now demanded my full attention and immediate action. As I sat, I alternated between plotting how I could quickly run down to the store between sits to purchase the *must-have* lotus flower, and attempting to relieve my mind of these intrusive and unpleasant thoughts. Try as I might—applying various types of effort, gently relaxing and calming my mind, refocusing my attention onto my breath—I could find no relief. Sitting in absolute silence, the desire to possess the little glass flower became voracious.

“OK then, I’ll just buy the darn thing so it won’t bug me anymore!”

Relief. But short lived.

“Should I get the turquoise one or the purple one? I like the turquoise one, but I also like the color purple. If I get the turquoise one then I’ll wish I got the purple one. But if I get the purple one I’ll wish I got the turquoise one. OK then, get one of each, a turquoise one and a purple one, that way they won’t bug me anymore!”

Relief.

“But the red one also looked nice the way the light hit it....”

This never ends.

Not lost on me was the irony that the lotus flower is a symbol of liberation. Not least of all, liberation from the desire to cling. I’d gone all the way to California to sit in a meditation hall so I could cling to a symbol of liberation from clinging.

In that respect, I guess my meditation retreat was a “success.” One of the reasons I’ve taken up the practice of meditation is to become more aware of all that’s going on inside me. In this instance, I came face-to-face with the persistent and nagging desire to cling—to have, grasp, hold onto, and possess. The glass flower wasn’t something I needed or even wanted. The desire to cling was simply present within me, on constant lookout for an object to latch onto and to bug me to possess. In the sparse environment of the meditation center, it latched onto the little glass flower. And did it ever bug me.

In Buddhist spirituality, the desire to cling is one of the primary causes of suffering. Once we possess the object of desire, the desire searches for and finds something else to latch onto and it begins bugging us all over again. And again and again and again. And if we don't get it, we're frustrated or anxious or angry. Jesus also identified this type of desire as a cause for suffering, teaching that God's creation provides all that we need, and if we take just what we need rather than seek all we desire, everyone will have enough. However, desire for more than we need, anxiety over getting our endless "wants" met, and hoarding up earthly treasures brings about suffering for ourselves and others.

For me, an element of Christian spirituality is becoming more aware of the powerful desire to cling that's at work within me—wanting what I don't need or even necessarily "want" simply because desire is on the lookout for objects to latch onto. As I witnessed in the meditation hall, the desire can be very subtle but it can quickly become voracious. Once aware of the desire, I can acknowledge it, confess it, and pray for the strength of God's spirit to help me not act upon it so readily. This isn't easy, especially in an economy that so effectively stokes our human desire to have more and that encourages us to act on this desire every chance we get. This stimulation and exploitation of human desire is indeed causing a lot of suffering on our planet. In my view, transforming our economy towards greater justice and sustainability includes, but isn't limited to, facing the very real and pervasive power of desire at work within us. I don't know if I can ever extinguish my desire to cling. But I do know that I can adopt the daily practice of becoming more aware of it, and I can seek the presence of mind and spiritual strength to not act upon it.

By the way, I did end up buying the turquoise lotus flower. I decided it would serve as a humorous reminder of my need for liberation from the desire to cling.

Sometimes I wish I bought the purple one.

TOM

**Micah 6
Food Pantry Needs
by Joan Mueller**

Please bring plastic grocery bags, diapers, large canned meats, fish, poultry, or make cash donations towards the purchase of food. Checks can be made to **Micah 6** or **Congregational Church of Austin** with a note that the donation is for Micah 6 Food Pantry. A basket is regularly brought forward at church each Sunday with all such donations.

The Austin American Statesman had a front page article about the distressing number of people who are living below the poverty line in Austin, including many children. This effort by our church members and friends, along with other Micah 6 Austin churches, enables us to continuously help our poorer neighbors.

**Adult Education Group
New Series Begins October 9
by Greg Futch**

On October 9th, the Adult Education Group will begin a series on seeking the historical Jesus, using the book *A Marginal Jew*. This is actually a 4 volume reference work, which is used by scholars and laypeople alike. The class will be led by **Greg Futch**, who holds a M.Div. from Emory, and who appreciates small discussion groups.

A Marginal Jew is an attempt to consolidate historical-critical research on Jesus and his times. It is an exhaustive search for the possible and the probable in the New Testament, with the question being: "Does this story go back to the historical Jesus?" Many times, the answer is in the negative. Many times, it is in the positive.

Please join us Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. on the 2nd floor. Newcomers, and more ladies are especially invited! We enjoy having a range of perspectives and thoughts in our reflections. Also, you're not required to attend all sessions, so please feel free to attend as your schedule allows.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
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**Fun Night Pot Luck
and Talent Show**

October 23 at 5 p.m.
University Baptist Church Fellowship Hall
Contact Reule Nash for more information or if you want to perform.

Personals by Pat Oakes

We were all saddened to learn of the death of **Ellen Deisler**, almost 84, who died on September 11 with Paul, her beloved husband of 61 years, by her side. Ellen lived a wonderful life and was loved by everyone. She had a great sense of humor, a great gift for art, was a chemical engineering graduate student when she met Paul, and was a wonderful wife, mother, and friend. She and Paul lived all over the U.S. and in Venezuela. For those of you who did not have the opportunity to know Paul and Ellen, they have been long-time, and until recently, active members of our church. They moved to Corpus Christi a few years ago to be closer to their daughter Jane, but remained in touch with many of us. Their love for one another was very deep. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Paul and to the entire Deisler family. Ellen ashes were interred at **The National Cemetery in San Antonio**. Those wishing to memorialize Ellen may send memorial gifts to a charity of their choice, to the **Congregational Church of Austin (UCC), 408 W. 23rd St., Austin, Texas, 78705**, or to the **University of Colorado Foundation, 4740 Walnut Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301** (dedicating the gift to the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Colorado).

As we grieve for the loss of Ellen, we welcome a new member of our church family and send congratulations to the Ross/Burnham/ Rosson families! **Samantha Houston Rosson** was born at 9:18 a.m. on September 13, 2011. She was 19" long, weighed 7 pounds and 2 oz, and has a nice crop of blonde hair. According to her happy mom, her favorite pastimes include napping, snacking, pooping, and cuddling with Daddy. The proud parents of Samantha are **Julia Ross** and **Robin Rosson** and the delighted grandparents are **Jim and Enid Ross, Chester Rosson, and Barbara Burnham**. She is named Samantha Houston for a very good reason — Barbara, Robin, and now Samantha are direct descendants of Sam Houston.

John Towery continues to make small improvements as he recuperates at the **Cedar View Rehabilitation Center, 11020 Dessau Road, Room 302 B, Austin, TX 78753**. He is up and walking a bit with a walker and getting a little stronger every day. The Towery "kids" think that he will be there for another 30 days or so. **Ches and Maggie** and **Mary and Danny** are making sure that **Eleanor** gets over to visit with John at least several times a week. Understandably, Eleanor misses John a great deal. John would enjoy cards or a visit, if you are in the area. Ches suggests that mornings are the best time to stop by. Eleanor would love cards, too — **1130 Camino la Costa #116, Austin, TX 78752-3952**.

Elizabeth Freese sent a report on the **Freese/Summerlin** family in early September. She says that following a full month without real furniture or other household stuff (a moving nightmare), sleeping on air mattresses, eating with plastic utensils, using the cooler as a dining table, etc., they finally got their stuff after the hurricane blew through, and they set up shop. **Rose and Vivian** now each have a loft bed over their own desks and love the individuation of it all. All of them are pretty comfortable, despite the smaller quarters, as they have what they really need and the layout is good. After enjoying the wildlife, playground, bike riding, and befriending a few kids at their campus apartment complex at the end of summer, the girls were ready to start school after Labor Day. Elizabeth and Talley are very pleased that the girls are quickly adjusting, making friends, appreciating their good teachers, and happily staying in the after school program until one of them picks them up at 5pm. It's been a big relief that everything has gone smoothly so far. Rose is also contemplating musical instruments, and both start karate and dance next week. Talley has accepted his current employer's offer to stay on as a contractor working from home until the end of the year. This is good as it allows him more time to explore his work options without locking in, and he's able to keep the wheels on the bus at home. He's also now researching his musical/performance opportunities in the area. Elizabeth has started school and has a lot on her plate — three classes — Classical Social Theory, Feminist/Gender Studies, and Sociology of Religion — and a part-time job with the **Green Seminary Initiative**. All in all, they are basically good, getting oriented and definitely overwhelmed until they get more organized and find a "new normal." Elizabeth says, "We miss Austin and all of you and hope you are well."

Nodie and Dennis Murphy had an unusually busy summer, filled with mind-broadening and mind-boggling experiences. First, Nodie attended a vocal pedagogy workshop at **The University of North Texas**, then Dennis and Nodie went further north to visit some of her extended family in Kansas. It was to their benefit that they were able to speak with her cousin's husband before cancer took his life. Their next trip was to **New Orleans** to celebrate Nodie's mother's 90th birthday. All seven of her siblings attended, with some of their families in tow, so it was a wild and crazy time. Before the party, Dennis and Nodie went to **Ocean Springs, Mississippi**, to visit with **Karlyn and David Stephens**, always an inspiration. Nodie's third trip was to **San Antonio** to the **Texas Choral Directors' Convention**, where she picked up some music to enrich our choral offerings this year.

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Then they were off on an Alaskan cruise under the guidance of the Road Scholar program (their first Road Scholar trip and their first cruise). Nodie observed that deep-down she's not a real cruise-type person, but the beautiful views and the interesting things they learned more than made up for the "entertainment" provided on board. They saw several glaciers up close — an overwhelming sight. Next month I'll have more news on Ned Murphy's basic training in the Army.

The South Central Conference UCC publication reports that **Whit Bodman, Associate Professor of Comparative Religion**, organized a youth retreat called **LEADD** (Leadership Education Advancing Democracy and Diversity) for two dozen religiously and ethnically diverse youth from Austin. The weekend retreat focused on the First Amendment religion clauses in the context of America's religious diversity. During his sabbatical, Whit has been finishing up the final edits on his book and attending a conference; the biannual meeting of the **Society for the Anthropology of Religion**, the **Annual Meeting of the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ** and a conference on **Scriptural Reasoning**.

Five-year-old twins **Juliet and Scarlett Quisenberry** started kindergarten this semester. They love every minute of it and have adjusted famously — even with being in separate classes for the first time. They love the cafeteria,



Juliet and Scarlett Quisenberry

PE, music, art class, their new teachers, recess, their snazzy seat back pockets, their backpacks, saying the pledge, and making lots of new friends. They had try-outs for the advanced gymnastics team at Champions Gymnastics and did well so they will start this semester as **Champions Academy Hotshots**. Their dad, 'Coach Quiz' has also signed on to coach their soccer team again this season and the first game was September 14th. Go Stingrays!

Congratulations to **Bill Beardall**, founder, and all those associated with the **Equal Justice Center**. The group, a local nonprofit that empowers low and moderate income workers to recover illegally withheld wages, was honored at the **8th annual Liveable Vision Awards** at a ceremony on Wednesday, Sept, 21, at the **Emma Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center**.

It was wonderful to see **Christy Kuhner** back after her summer hiatus on Sunday, Sept. 11. Not only did she bring a beautiful flower arrangement echoing the twin towers and the Pentagon, but she brought an old friend (her first boyfriend, some forty years ago) from her time as a teenager in **Turkey, Toros Altuntugu**. They lost touch after she returned to America. On 9/11/01 his daughter was working in Manhattan and lived a few blocks from the World Trade Center. Fortunately, her office was on the other side of the city. Toros was in Turkey with his 9-year-old grandson. His wife died after a long battle with cancer on the same day. Later that year, he brought his grandson to New York and stayed to take care of him for two years. He was at the first anniversary memorial service at **Ground Zero**, which affected him very deeply. He had been trying to find Christy again since he came to New York ten years ago, but he did not know her married name. He found one of Christy's sisters this summer and called Christy out of the blue. They had a wonderful visit — although he prefers the weather in California where his daughter now lives. (Don't we all!)

Toros, a secular Muslim who feels passionately that Americans should know that most Muslims condemn what happened and any violence against civilians, spoke very eloquently during the time for joys and concerns about his anguish over 9/11— and how welcome he felt at our church (the first Christian service he had ever attended). Christy says that we will be seeing Toros in the future whenever his family obligations permit. Christy says it may be the barbecue that brings him back to Texas. He thinks it is the best thing he ever ate.

Our wonderful Sunday school teacher **Robynne Heymans** has resigned from her position as a receptionist at a law firm and accepted a part-time nanny job with a great family, with better pay and benefits. She is very excited about this change because it affords her lots of time and flexibility to pursue a freelance landscape design career — something that's been in the works for the last year. Of course, she'll still be working as Sunday school teacher at the church. She appreciates all of our thoughts and prayers as she transitions into this new phase in her life.

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Brazos Association News

July and August 2011

by Liz Nash

On Sunday, September 18th, **Friedens Church of Washington** voted to call **Greg Felder** as their pastor. Greg, a colleague, friend, and former pastor to many of us in the Brazos Association, had been serving as the church's acting pastor since last fall following the interim ministry there of **George Klett**. Greg served for several years as the associate pastor of St. John's UCC in Burton and, before that, completed the licensed ministry program in the **Brazos Association**. It is a joy to be able to share this news about Friedens and about Greg. Our prayers are with them for a faithful and flourishing ministry together.

During our **Brazos Association September Church and Ministry Committee meeting**, we met with **Ana Deter of Friends Congregational, College Station**, and voted to license her. Ana has been studying and working toward licensed ministry for the past three years with a very supportive committee at her church and with **Mary Wilson** as her mentor. We will be celebrating Ana at our **October 15th Brazos Association Fall Meeting in Washington**. Our Church and Ministry Committee also met with **Karen Nelson** and received her transfer of ministerial standing from the **North Texas Association**. Karen served in the Brazos Association a few years ago as the interim minister at **Weimar UCC** before moving to Lubbock. She now serves as the interim pastor at **Martin Luther Lutheran Church in Carmine** and is a member of Friends Congregational. We welcome Karen, a colleague and friend to many of us, back to the Brazos Association.

Two of our churches are celebrating milestones in their work and ministry. On Sunday, September 11th, **St. John's UCC, Burton**, celebrated the 30th anniversary of **Glen Schoeneberg** as their pastor. Part of the festivities included having Glen sit for a **Pastor's Time with the Children**, told to him by the children of the church. The tables

where people sat were decorated with pictures from throughout **Glen and Dottie Schoeneberg's** life and ministry in Burton. Coming up on **Saturday, October 1st, United Christian Church Austin** will be having a party to celebrate its 20th anniversary and **Tim Tutt's** 10th anniversary as pastor there. Glen, Tim, and both of these churches have rich and generous ministries that have reached into many lives. We rejoice with them!

On Saturday, September 10th, we had a boundary training session for our ministers at **St. John's, Burton**, led by **Cheryl von Ehrenkrook**, who serves the Conference in a number of ways in volunteer ministry. About 18 people completed the training, the largest number being from the Brazos Association. Most of our ordained and licensed ministers have now completed this training, which is required for ministerial standing (or about to be required as associations vote on this) throughout the South Central Conference. We believe it is helpful for our pastors and congregations not only in preventing abuse but also in helping our ministers know how to care for themselves over time and in difficult situations that sometimes arise. I appreciate the cooperation and willingness of our ministers in getting the training, and we appreciate the work Cheryl and the Conference have done to make a quality training available to us.

I hope all of you will plan to join us on Saturday morning, **October 15 from 10 am through lunch at Friedens Church of Washington** for our **Fall Brazos Association Meeting**. We look forward to being together with church members and with **Greg Felder** to congratulate and rejoice with them at this new beginning in their ministry.

Blessings,
Liz Nash

Are You A Techno Sapien?

Celebrating 10 years of excellence, the **Sr. Mary Rose McPhee, DC, Lecture & Workshop on Leadership and Spirituality** will feature **Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF**, a senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University. A nationally known speaker, Dr. Delio is an expert in the area of science and religion. Dr. Delio's work bridges the spheres of science and religion – exploring how insights from evolution, ecology and technology are influencing the shape of human life today; the needs that are emerging and the impact of science on our understanding of the meaning and purpose of religions.

The Seton Cove sponsored lecture and workshop will be October 6 and 7. For more information and to register go to www.setoncove.net or call 451-0272.

Joe Barry
Seton Cove Educator

Micah 6 News

by Liz Nash

Micah 6 is working to set up and launch a new drop-in center for homeless youth and young adults (generally 30 years old and younger) on Sunday afternoons from 2-6 pm at **University Baptist Church**. This center will supplement the work **Life-works** does in hosting its Street Youth drop in during the week for persons age 23 and younger, as well as adding to other work with homeless youth and young adults among our churches. Our target date to start this ministry is the first Sunday in November.

At this point, we are starting to recruit volunteers to host the center, with four people needed each Sunday (training will be available), with the commitment being once a month (or more, if someone is willing). We also need donations of computers, a printer and its driver (usually comes on a CD), leather or vinyl couches, comfortable leather or vinyl chairs in good condition, tables for the computers, a couple of lightweight tables like those stored in our fellowship hall, a refrigerator, a good

blender for making smoothies, a bulletin board, and possibly an espresso maker. All of these items need to be in good shape, both for the center and to be used for other purposes at the church. We will also need volunteers who will supply a meal for late in the afternoon, and a person who is willing to help with scheduling people. We are excited to be able to start this work, and we need plenty of hands to help! Contact **Liz Nash** at lizknash@gmail.com, 512-799-2782, if you can volunteer or donate:

Micah 6 is also looking for more volunteers to help unload food deliveries on Thursday mornings at 6:30 am. It would help if you can lift 35 lbs., but you are invited to help even if that weight is too heavy.

Contact **Linda Williams**, Micah 6 Executive Director at lindahop@lindahop.com or **Liz Nash** if you are willing to help.

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It was a delight to see our former child caregiver, **Emily Everidge**, in church on September 18th. She had a great summer in New Hampshire, visited friends in New York City, and was back in town visiting family and friends.



(l to r) Robynne Heymans, Nancy Edison, Shannon Quisenberry, Emily Everidge and Rachel Dietz in church on September 18.

Lois and John Drachenberg are relieved to report that Lois's daughter, along with her 2 dogs and a baby goat survived the Labor Day weekend fire in Bastrop. She was told to evacuate and had her animals loaded in her

truck, but the wind blew the other way and she was all right. Lois and John will be moving again in October to a location that is closer to their church (**Altamonte Chapel, UCC**, built in 1875) and their doctors. John's back trouble continues and they both have balance issues, but they are still active (Bible study among other things) and getting around. They are moving to a new apartment area with 300 single story units. Their new address is **Villa Del Mar, 528 Royal Palm Court, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701**.

Debbie Appel Knowlton and her husband **Bob** missed seeing all their friends at church last month. Daughter Emily had a stomach virus, and Debbie had to take her to the doctor to get it checked out instead. In spite of the tummy upset, Debbie and the kids had a nice visit with Vic and Betty Appel, despite the heat. It was great for us to see Debbie's sister **Cheryl** who came to visit (from Madison, Wisconsin) as well. All three generations went bowling, swimming, and played pool. They made some nice memories that they will cherish. They went to Jean's gravesite to honor and remember her as they approach the 10th anniversary of her passing. It was sad, but helpful.

Bob was supposed to be here, but couldn't make it because of **Hurricane Irene**. Fortunately, the **Knowltons** (who live in North Salem, New York) didn't have any damage from the hurricane. Bob worked valiantly day and night for two weeks to prevent the dams of New York

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State from bursting. All of the residents of the **Catskill Mountains** were very grateful to him when he succeeded! Good work, Bob!



Cheryl Appel (l) with her dad, Vic, and Cathy Hubbs in church on August 28.

Jake Burlinson will be leaving for **Ft. Hood** soon in preparation for deployment to the Middle East. During the time of the terrible fires over Labor Day weekend he worked his regular highway patrol shift, put in six 12 hour overnight fire duty shifts out at Bastrop, and traveled to San Antonio and Ft. Hood for the National Guard. Including travel, he finished up a 90 hour work week. His mom **Carol** notes that it is a good thing he's young. These wildfires have stretched first responders to the limit. She also says for us to be really vigilant. It only takes seconds for a fire to flare up. Jake pulls people over when he sees someone toss a lighted cigarette butt out the window. Jake used to just give a warning for that — now he gives tickets.

Mel and Pat Oakes had a wonderful visit with their daughter **Sarah** and son-in-law **Joe** in Washington D.C. the last weekend in September. They met Pat's sister **Nancy**, a retired school librarian and former **Peace Corps** volunteer, at Dulles Airport, where Sarah picked them up and brought them home. Nancy and Pat enjoyed walking in the rain (a real novelty here in Austin these days) to the hardware store for Mel, who was working on household projects. The three loved being at the National Book Fair on the Mall on Saturday and Sunday which is readily accessible from Sarah and Joe's house. (They live right across the street from the East Falls Church metro station). A highlight was hearing a presentation by **Jim**



It was good to see Rhys, Michelle and Ozark Ulerich in church on September 8.



Sunday School kick-off breakfast on August 28. Front—Rachel Dietz helps Elizabeth, Francesca, and Skye Scott as Robyn Heymans looks on. Back —Shannon and Jason Quisenberry, Jim Howicz, Kevin Dietz with Emily and Tess Howicz.

Lehrer of *The News Hour* on PBS. On that Sunday morning, in honor of 50 years of the Peace Corps, a memorial service was held at Arlington National Cemetery for the 280 Peace Corps volunteers who died while in service (over 200,000 have served in the 50 years). Nancy, Sarah, and Pat attended the service and Nancy and Pat walked in the parade of flags representing all of the countries where the Peace Corps has been a presence. Nancy and Doug served in Nepal in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an experience that changed their lives and enriched the lives of the rest of the family. It was an amazing experience to be with so many like-minded idealistic folks who have served this country so well.

The Congregational Church of Austin
408 West 23rd Street
Austin, Texas 78705-5214

Return Service Requested

Deadline for November Visitor - Oct. 21

**You're invited to the
FALL MEETING OF
THE BRAZOS ASSOCIATION
Saturday October 15, 2011
Friedens Church of Washington, UCC
Washington, Texas**

Registration: 9:30 a.m. with Coffee, Juice, Donuts, etc... Come earlier if you like—we'll be ready.
Worship & Meeting to begin promptly at 10 a.m.

Tentative Schedule:

Worship time

Celebrate the Licensed Ministry of Anna Deter

Business Meeting

A Time of Sharing

(please try to keep to 2 minutes or less)

Presentation from General Synod

Communion

Lunch (\$6.00 donation appreciated)

Please RSVP with the number attending and staying for lunch to **Friedens Church** at one of the following:
pastorfriedens@embarqmail.com or to the church office phone: 936-878-2523