

# THE VISITOR

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

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**

**Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus**

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**W**ithin this month's edition of *The Visitor*, Marilyn Vache extends an invitation to participate in our church's "discipleship group." This group formed this past year in response to a few Sunday morning reflections I offered on discipleship and transformation. I thought I'd offer an excerpt from one of those sermons for those of you who may be interested in participating in the discipleship group. What I share below reflects my own view of discipleship, but each person in the group brings their view and experience, and together we create a rich mix of Christian disciples. If you're interested in participating, please see me and I'll give you a few readings and bring you up to speed with what we've done thus far.

The following is the excerpt.

Thomas Berry, in his book *The Great Work*, makes a startling claim: "We might describe the challenge before us by the following sentence. The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human."

I have to say, I whole-heartedly agree with Thomas Berry. This should come as no surprise to you. I've preached this message many times. If you could sum up my preaching in one sentence it would be this: Jesus Christ sought to transform or "reinvent" the human being, and Christian discipleship is about submitting ourselves to transformation so we may become human in a new way, a *Christ* way.

But how? How do we undergo transformation so we may become human in a new way, a Christ way? Or to draw on Richard Rohr—how do we think our way into a new way of living, and live our way into a new way of thinking? Or Henri Nouwen—how do we undergo the transformation of our hearts in a way that supports the transformation of society? For me, this is the only question that really matters for the church. *How?*

After listening to my reflection last week, one of you asked me if I ever thought of starting a ministry or gathering or whatever where people could get together to ask this very question. *How?* A ministry or gathering or whatever where people could reflect together on this discipleship question and support one another in their transformation. A ministry for folks who think the one issue that really matters is how we undergo transformation. How we *become* a new human being and how we *sustain* ourselves in that new Christ-way of being human. How we submit ourselves to reinvention and contribute positively to the reinvention of human society so that human beings can live in greater harmony on the earth and with the earth.

The answer is yes, I have thought about it. And it seems several things are needed to start such a ministry or group or whatever. I'll quickly mention four of them.

**One.** A critical mass of people committed to doing this—and I mean absolutely *committed*. People who really, deep down, think "this is it." This is what it's all about. This is where my spiritual journey is right now. This is the overriding concern of my life. This is the one question that really matters.

**Two.** A willingness to experiment and to create something brand new, something we haven't done before, something that can continue to grow and deepen, evolve and emerge, something with structure but whose form can change as the participants in it are transformed and reinvented.

**Three.** A sense of urgency. A deep and profound sense that we really need to do this and we need to do it *now*.

**Four.** An equally deep and profound sense of patience. This is difficult work—work that includes stirring up powerful emotions like grief and anger, feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless, a sense of being trapped in ways of living from which we cannot easily extricate ourselves, the experience of being lost, confused, and dislocated, and the belief that change is so darn slow that nothing I do really seems to matter in the big picture. We need a sense of patience, and a deep sense of compassion and mercy.

It seems to me these four components really need to be present if such a ministry or gathering or whatever is really going to be serious about addressing this transformation question. We're not talking about another discussion group or Bible Study. We're talking about a real honest-to-goodness transformational ministry.

Again, if you're interested, please speak to me.

Peace,  
Tom

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### Discipleship Group: Update and New Invitation

A small group of people responded to **Tom Van-deStadt's** invitation, extended during a series of sermons last year, to explore what it means to be a disciple, to follow the way of the cross, in our 21st century lives. The group has met about once a month, on Wednesday evenings, and has looked at writings by people like **Joanna Macy, Robert Jensen, and Bill Plotkin**. The participants have talked about their visions for their lives and about the obstacles to living those visions fully. They are considering undertaking a study of our culture's "addiction to entitlement" -- also called "Empire" - as suggested by writer **Ched Myers** and modeled on the 12 steps of **Alcoholics Anonymous**. Any church attendees and members who were unable to respond to the initial invitation but are interested in participating are welcome to speak to Tom.

### CCA Board of Deacons Approve Candidacy for Ordination

Celebrate! On **Tuesday, November 15th** the Brazos Association Church and Ministry Committee met at **St. John's UCC in Burton, Texas**. **Beth Gleason**, a **CCA Deacon** and local seminarian, who is "in discernment" and under care of the **Brazos Association**, was interviewed and approved by the committee to move forward in the ordination process. Beth has been sponsored by the CCA church family for the past two years as part of the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ, and had been first approved by our Board of Deacons at their October 12th meeting.

Brazos Association leader and CCA member, **Rev. Dr. Liz Nash**, who also taught Beth UCC polity and history over the summer with seminarian/candidate **Scott Spence**, was present at this meeting. The third step toward approval for ordination will be in **April 2012** at an **Ecclesiastical Council** meeting, where Beth will be interviewed by all those ordained in the South Central Conference.

Beth would like to extend her heartfelt thanks to the Deacons, especially the **Deacon Chair, Joe McMillan**, for their support of her throughout the discernment period within her church family.

#### CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Trustees Chair	Jaime Hadley
Deacons Chair	Joe McMillan
Christian Outreach Chair	Bill Beardall
Moderator	Reuel Nash
Treasurer	David Ross
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Clerk	Betty Bodman
Historian	Whit Bodman

## Personals by Pat Oakes

**C**hes Towery reports that family members moved **John and Eleanor Towery** from Parsons House where they have lived for the past several years to **The Cottages in Round Rock** on Sunday, Nov. 20. The level of care that John needs was not available at Parsons House and both John and Eleanor wanted to be together. Their new address is:

The Cottages  
2351 North A.W. Grimes Blvd  
Round Rock, Tx 78665  
Their phone # will remain the same - 512-453-1800  
The phone # for the The Cottages is 512-218-9757

They would love to have cards and letters and visitors are most welcome. John and Eleanor will celebrate their 61st wedding anniversary on December 9.

**Greg and Margaret Futch** are delighted to announce the birth of their first grandchild, **Alexander Henry Futch** who was born to their son **Matt and his wife Cyndi** in Denver on Nov. 2, 2011. Alex weighed in at a very healthy 8 pounds and 13 ounces and is 21 inches long. Grampa Greg says that he has a great temperament so far. Greg and Margaret spent Thanksgiving in Denver with much time spent at the new baby's home and also visiting other family and friends in the area.

Our much-loved **Ben White** is receiving hospice care in his apartment at Westminster Manor in Austin at this writing. He still enjoys short visits and cards and letters. Keep him and his family in your prayers.

**Debbie Appel** called on Saturday to report that her father, **Vic Appel**, is in Seton Hospital Central with breathing issues and pneumonia. He is in Room #496 and would welcome cards or visitors. Debbie's phone number is 914-318-9450, if you would like more information.

**Harrison Tucker** had a wonderful 7th birthday (Nov 12) at Main Event rock climbing with his friends. He had a family birthday dinner that evening and his cousins, **Jessica Jamieson and Tucker Jamieson from Dallas and Aunt Gloria Rennie from California** were here. **Savanna** celebrated her 10th birthday on Nov 23, and she was excited. Before she was in school, Savanna could not understand why Harrison was younger than she, yet his birthday was first!

It was a joy to see **Jeri Winter Gradecki** in church on Sunday November 13 with her son **Wylan**. Husband Ray had to stay in Illinois as he is working hard on finishing his nursing degree in May. She was so delighted to be back to visit and everyone was delighted to see her. She kept saying, "There just isn't another church anywhere like 3 this church!"



Fran Briggs, Tommie Pinkard, Sara Ross and Doyal Pinkard catching up with former member Jeri (Winter) Gradecki and son Wylan at church on Sunday, Nov. 13, 2011.

**Dennis Murphy** celebrated his 70th birthday in fine style the week of Nov. 17. Nodie arranged a surprise celebration for Dennis at coffee hour on Sunday, the 13th, com-



Birthday boy Dennis Murphy at his surprise celebration at church on November 13, 2011.

plete with a delicious cake made by **Robynne Heymans** and a lively birthday song with words written by the amazing Nodie to the tune of **The Irish Washerwoman**. **Andy Streitlemeier** played the tune on the violin and folks joined in singing the song celebrating Dennis's life and achievements.

**Robynne Hyemans** is putting her baking skills to work to raise money for her participation in the mission trip to Honduras. If you need a cake for any occasion, please let Robynne know.

**Olivia Vaché**, daughter of **Marilyn Vaché** and **Graylin Grissett** and a junior at Sarah Lawrence in New York City, is doing much better as she recuperates from surgery on her right knee. She badly injured her knee and had to have three ligaments and a meniscus using cadaver transplants. Graylin flew to New York City to be with Olivia at the time of the surgery. She is delighted that all she needs now is the brace on her knee—the cane has been discarded. She flew home for the Thanksgiving holidays and enjoyed seeing her folks and catching up with old friends.

In an attempt to prove that one is never too old to learn, travel to a new country alone, and live in a college dorm for two weeks (the bathroom and shower were one level



Jo Jensen had a wonderful time in England this past summer.

up), **Jo Jensen**, an in-care candidate at our church and a chaplain at **Dell Children's Hospital**, traveled to the UK in August to attend a summer theology intensive program at **Oxford University**. After flying to New York and continuing with a 6-hour flight “across the pond,” she arrived at Heathrow at 6 a.m. feeling more tired than adventurous. Sleeping in a comfortable bed seemed more appealing than the London tour she had previously booked, but she persevered and thoroughly enjoyed the double-decker

bus tour of London’s more famous spots, including **Big Ben, London Bridge and Buckingham Palace**. Once at Oxford, she settled into her dorm room at **Christ Church College** and began meeting many of the 45 global students she would be sharing class time, meals, and a Starbucks or two with over the next fourteen days. **Oxford** teaching style is lecture-oriented rather than interactive dialogue which was challenging for students adapting to significant time changes, but they survived with extremely active exchanges during breaks and over wonderful meals in the gorgeous dining hall – the room used for filming scenes from Harry Potter.

The beauty and history of **Oxford** was intoxicating and the cool temperatures a welcome change from the 100-degree Austin August weather. They walked everywhere, savored authentic fish and chips at pubs where **C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien** ate, drank and wrote, and they felt somewhat more intelligent for simply being at Oxford. If you have an interest in viewing any of the hundreds of photographs Jo shot, just send her a “friend request” on Facebook and you can tour London and Oxford at your leisure. Jo loved every minute of her time there and enjoys texting, chatting, and emailing the charming new friends she made there.

Friends of the church, **Bill and Carolyn Howe**, live on 10 acres in the high hills, between **Wimberley** and **Blanco** and are trying to live off the water grid. They arrived in the Austin area in the fall of 2008 in the middle of a drought. They built their 40 feet x 50 feet pole barn (the roof designed to collect water), or, as they call it, their rain barn, in the spring of 2009. Under the 14 feet high roof, they put one 15,000 gallon fiberglass tank with pumping, filter, and UV stations to deliver the rain water to their RV and, eventually, to their cabin. They felt, when this tank filled, they would buy another tank, and so on. The rain started coming in September 2009. They had enough water to buy, not one, but two more 15,000 gallon tanks. They then built their cabin which increased their roof area to 3200 sq ft., but increased their water usage, as well, from 1000 gallons per month in the RV to 3000 gallons per month in the cabin. They are now building another barn for workshop/storage which will increase their roof area to 4400 sq ft (which allows them to collect about 2700 gal per inch of rain). They have had to buy water for their tanks a few times, but as they increase their roof area, when it does (finally) rain, they will be able to collect more water.

**Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers** celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary Nov. 19 - 21 at Lake Buchanan.

## Brazos Association News

October 2011

by Liz Nash

**T**he UCC has just concluded its **Mission One Campaign**, ending 11-11-11, for hunger ministries, with an extraordinary outpouring of giving, exceeding every goal. As I write this, the counting is not complete but over 1.25 million food items have been donated and over 36,000 letters have been written to Congress on behalf of the needs hungry people. The tally of received and committed funds for **Neighbors in Need** related ministries (UCC outreach in the US) and for Africa famine relief has exceeded \$130,000 for each cause and may go much higher. I know many of our **Brazos Association** churches were part of this effort, and I thank you. I also know that ongoing giving to the hungry, poor, and homeless is so much part of the “DNA” of the ministry of some of our churches that they just continued with what they already do without officially joining in the campaign. Thanks to you, too, for all that you do all of the time. Our pouring out in this way is a sign of our life in Christ.

At the beginning of November, I attended the **UCC Disaster Ministry meeting in New Orleans** as a Disaster Ministry Coordinator of the South Central Conference. There we were part of the worship celebration of the closing of the **New Orleans Disaster Ministry. Jerry and Doris Carpenter** of our Association also traveled to New Orleans to be part of the worship. The New Orleans Disaster Ministry, led by **Rev. Alan Coe**, has been hosting groups since 2006 from all over the US to help rehab and rebuild homes. To give you an idea of the reach and magnitude of the work done, supported by national UCC “Hope Shall Bloom” donations and hosted by our Conference, here are some of the facts about the work and workers: 7035 volunteers from all over the US and several foreign countries, 572 groups who came and worked, 113 projects complete to give people and churches restored homes and lives, 175,875 hours worked, \$3,738,505 of value added labor.

Four of the New Orleans churches hosted groups, with this being a primary ministry and building use for most of them. Many people served as long term volunteers to help run the ministry. A large number of volunteers came to the closing worship and shared how their lives were changed and enriched by joining in this work of Christ made possible by gifts and devotion across the UCC. At least for the coming year, there will still be opportunities to go work in New Orleans in a UCC-affiliated ministry through the **Phoenix of New Orleans**. (See <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/mission-trip-opportunities/louisiana.html> ).

As I have already noted recently, we encourage our churches and youth to plan on attending the **National Youth Event** next summer, **July 10-13, at Purdue University**. The cost at the event will be \$425 per person, which covers room, board, and registration. It is likely that the Brazos Association will be able to help substantially with money for travel. (See <http://www.ucc.org/calendar/national-youth-event-2012.html> for more details.)

Finally, a “save the date” for your calendars: the **Brazos Association Spring meeting** will be **Sunday, April 22** at Friends Congregational UCC in College Station. I announce with joy that we will have an Ecclesiastical Council for **Beth Gleason**, member in discernment from Congregational Church of Austin at that meeting – and we may have more candidates for ministry ready for this by April. Plan to join us!

Blessings in Christ,  
Liz Nash  
Brazos Association Minister

## PERSONALS—continued from page 4

They took the **Vanishing Texas River Cruise** just as they did on their honeymoon. However, they stayed at the **Canyon of the Eagles Lodge** this time. Marilyn is delighted to report that she and George are still perking along.

**Eunice Paul**, former member and 90 years young, reports that her recent trip in celebration of her birthday was fantastic - everything worked according to plan or better. It started with an upgrade on the flight to New York and a surprise birthday cake with champagne! Daughter **Lydia** and Eunice were picked up at J.F.K. by ex-daughter-in-law, **Sali**, and driven to son-in-law Dean's brother's home in Hartford, where they stayed for three days. The weather was fantastic - between the two storms when nearly everyone lost power for as long as a week. They rented a car and spent a day visiting a school friend of Lydia's who lives near **Mystic Seaport**. **Emery** plays French horn in the **Hartford Symphony** and there was a concert on Friday evening which they were able to attend. They spent the morning at a fabulous craft show at the Convention Center - they had heard about it months before and the timing was just right. On Saturday they took the train into New York City, had dinner with Sali at a fun restaurant and a surprise birthday cupcake with candle! They stayed in a hotel in **Manhattan** and son **Tim**, from Pittsburgh, and son Martin from Redding joined us there for breakfast. They then went together to the **Queen Mary 2** and had a great week - with two more surprise birthday cakes - one in each of the two restaurants where they dined.

Eunice reports that the ship is enormous - bigger than all the other **Cunard** ships they have sailed on and most luxurious. A very different experience from their first crossing in 1951 with one-year old **Lydia** in diapers which Eunice had to wash in seawater and drape round the cabin to dry! The crossing was good - they all exercised their shuffleboard skills again. Apparently there was a Force 8 gale but they were unaware of it. The day they returned they had a tea-party with grandson **Nathaniel**, his wife, and their two children with yet another birthday cake. Tim had to return the day after they landed but Martin stayed in England for ten more days. Now, believe it or not, Eunice is off on a two-week cruise to the **Canary Islands!** Ninety sounds pretty good!

**Stephen and Jeanine Neuse** report that they are having a busy fall in **Fayetteville, Arkansas**, although they did get to Texas in October. They are both involved with a number of groups, including **Altrusa (a service organization)**, **Senior Democrats**, **University of Arkansas Retired Employees**, their church, etc. While in Texas they saw two

football games where their grandsons **Bryce and Jayce** were playing. Their team made it to the playoffs-no results on the outcome as yet. They also visited with grandson **Nathanael** and his parents. They stayed mostly with **Micah and Kara**, parents of Bryce and Jayce.

Also, this is just a reminder about contacting **Ned Murphy**, He would like, very much, to hear from anyone who remembers him and cares to write. His address is:

PV2 Murphy, Benjamin  
194th AR BDE, 5-15th Cav  
E Troop, 1st Platoon  
Fort Benning, GA 31905



Pat the Pilgrim visited with the children on Sunday, Nov. 20, 2011. Francesca, Savanna, Harrison, Isabella and John thought that Pilgrims did not wear sneakers!

## CHURCH WORLD SERVICE PROGRAM

**Joan Mueller and Beth Gleason** will be offering the opportunity for CCA congregants and any others to purchase alternative gifts this Christmas season. It's a **Church World Service** program, "Best Gift" catalog. In this catalog you can purchase/sponsor livestock, seeds, tools, school supplies, relief and recovery supplies, ways to affect water supplies, you name it. Gifting starts for as little as \$15 and your gift helps bring genuine and lasting change to those who need it most.

**Church World Service** works in partnership to assist people in the world's poorest countries to find effective ways of attacking poverty and injustice. Catalogs and more information about purchasing these wonderful gifts will be available in the church Fellowship Hall after each Sunday service through the Advent season.

## Micah 6 Youth Drop In Center Volunteers and Furnishings Needed

**Micah 6** needs volunteers to serve as hosts as our new Sunday afternoon drop-in center for homeless youth and young adults 30 years old and under. This center will be located at University Baptist and will run from 2-6 pm (meaning volunteer hosts should arrive at about 1:30). The drop in center will open on Sunday, January 22, 2012. It will include a place of fellowship (out of the weather), a healthy meal, a computer lab and special educational and self-care programs under. Host volunteers will be asked to serve once per month with a team of four each week. Within that once a month commitment, scheduling will be flexible to accommodate our volunteer availability. We will be offering training in early January.

We also are looking for gently used furniture, such as vinyl/leather couches, chairs, and love seats; several working desktop computers with software such as windows and a word processor; light-weight folding tables to serve food on; computer tables or desks (for the computers); 2 micro-waves; a big commercial blender to make smoothies; and a bulletin board.

If you can help as a volunteer, possibly donate one of the above items, or want more details, please contact Liz Nash at 231-0045 (home), 799-2782 (cell), or by email at [lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com). We especially need volunteers to be able to get started on our target date in January.

Thanks!

## CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF AUSTIN, UCC Financial Pledge – 2011

Our church is a community of people responding to Jesus' call to follow him. Opening ourselves to and living in the spirit of God, we are engaged in the ongoing project of creating a community that liberates, heals, reconciles, pursues justice, and promotes peace.

Stewardship is the means through which we participate in the ongoing creation of this community. The more we discern, open ourselves to, and live in God's spirit, the more God's grace is manifested in and through us.

Our church budget reflects our financial commitment to the ongoing creation of this liberating, healing, reconciling, justice-seeking, peace-promoting community of Jesus' disciples that we call the Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ.

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Discerning Jesus Christ's call to me while reflecting on my commitment to the on-going creation of the Congregational Church of Austin, UCC, and taking stock of my financial resources, I am prepared to pledge the following amount for the ongoing work of the church in 2011.

\_\_\_\_\_ per week

\_\_\_\_\_ per month

\_\_\_\_\_ per year

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Return Service Requested**

## Deadline for January Visitor - December 19

### Calendar

**World AIDS Day Interfaith Service of Remembrance and Hope**

Dec. 1 - St. David's Episcopal Church, 301 E. 8th Street, 7:00 pm.

**Holiday Sing-Along and Stroll**

Dec. 3 sponsored by the Downtown Austin Association

**Waterloo Trio** ([www.waterlootrio.com](http://www.waterlootrio.com)) **Café Medici** - downtown at the Austonian (2nd and Congress)

**James Anderson – Violin Tony Rogers – Cello Jonathan Geer - Piano**

**Dec. 3 - Noon to 2pm Dec. 10 - 11am to 1pm Dec. 17 - 12:30pm to 2:30pm**

Performing the music of Beethoven, Debussy, Ravel, Bjork, Geer, Piazzolla and much more.

**Travis Heights Art Trail** this weekend, **December 3 and 4** from 11 to 5 at 1410 Travis Heights Boulevard. **Joan Mueller** will have her art studio open as part of the show. Her studio is in the back. For more information go to [www.travisheightsart.com](http://www.travisheightsart.com).

**ART FROM THE STREETS** has their annual two day **sale of homeless art** at St David's at 7th and Trinity **Dec. 3 and 4**, 11 to 4.

**Micah 6 Benefit Concert** – 4 pm, **Saturday, December 10. University Avenue Church of Christ** invites all to hear “Sounds of the Season.” Featuring the Austin Harmony Chorus (in the barbershop tradition) and Texas A Capella Chorus, along with invited guests. Tickets: \$12 presale, \$15 at the door. Seniors, military and students - \$12 at the door. Pre-sale tickets can be purchased at [www.acapellatexas.org](http://www.acapellatexas.org) Free parking at the AT&T Conference Center garage. Canned food and monetary donations will be collected for the Micah 6 food pantry. Come enjoy beautiful secular and sacred music in celebration of Advent.

**The Joyful Noise Orchestra Dec. 18.** During CCA worship service. If you would like to participate, please contact Nodie Murphy at [nodienice@gmail.com](mailto:nodienice@gmail.com) or give her a call at 255-4602.

**Christmas Candlelight Service** on Sunday, Dec. 18, at 7 pm. Following the service, Pat and Mel Oakes will host their annual Christmas party.