

THE VISITOR

January 2013

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up."

Anne Lamott

We began our season of Advent prior to Christmas by reflecting on hope, particularly hope's stubborn quality. In my reflection, I noted that the iconic picture of **Dorothy Day** at a **United Farm Workers** strike--age 75, sitting in a chair, hands folded, legs crossed, surrounded by police officers—epitomized for me hope's stubborn quality. Hope can be a powerful motivating force for action in the world, inciting people to show up time and time again, sleeves rolled up, to engage some issue, face some challenge, or just sit there refusing to budge, even against great odds or after suffering defeat after defeat. Hope can enable people to see light flickering at the end of a long tunnel, or to keep pushing a stone that'll never move in their lifetime.



So many struggles for justice, equality, and peace are of this sort. Struggles against overwhelming odds. Struggles in which more setbacks and defeats are suffered than victories celebrated. Struggles in which one generation passes the torch to the next with the instruction to just keep on keeping on. When I think of hope that motivates long-term struggle, I think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. It bends towards justice, but here is the thing: it does not bend on its own. It bends because each of us in our own ways put our hand on that arc and we bend it in the direction of justice." Hope that fuels long-term struggle must be stubborn. For hope to even exist, it must be stubborn.

But stubbornness is a two-edged sword. There's a difference between the stubbornness we may consider positive and the stubbornness we may consider negative, and both types are key to the Biblical drama, wherein the ancient **Israelites** are stubborn in ways that get them into trouble and ways that enable them to survive. On the negative side, their stiff-necked, hard-hearted, and self-centered stubbornness repeatedly strains their relationship with God and leads them headlong into multiple hardships. Repeatedly, we hear God's complaint that the people God has called are a stiff-necked, hard-hearted, stubborn lot. On the positive side, their stubborn faithfulness to God in times of crises, and their stubborn hope in God's deliverance, salvation, and promised kingdom, enables them to cling to their relationship with God, maintain their identity, and keep from being swallowed up by the world around them, despite being invaded, occupied, and exiled. One type of stubbornness brings them heaps of trouble, while the other type enables them to withstand disasters piled onto hardships.

Perhaps the positive side of people's stubbornness in the Bible reflects a divine stubbornness. Though the word often used is "steadfast," one could argue that the God of the Bible is pretty stubborn. Central to the Biblical drama is God's stubborn faithfulness to the covenant God made with **Abraham**, God's stubborn hope that one day Abraham's descendants will actually fulfill their end of the covenantal relationship, and God's stubborn love that comes to manifest itself as embodied light that darkness cannot overcome.

I'm hoping that as we enter the new year together, we'll embody positive stubbornness--stubborn faith, stubborn hope, stubborn love--showing up time after time, sleeves rolled up, with a relentless willingness to work and a refusal to budge on those issues we most highly value, those issues in which we discern God calling us to follow that flicker of light and to push that heavy stone. May we keep on keeping on in 2013, and experience the spirit of Christ in all our efforts.

TOM

CCA Calendar January 2013

Singer **Luke Leverett** will be singing at the Congregational Church of Austin on **Sunday, January 13**, at 2:00 pm. This is a joint program sponsored by our church and University Christian Church. Stay tuned for details regarding lunch plans preceding the concert.

The Congregational Church of Austin **Annual Meeting** will be held on **Sunday, January 27**, following worship. All members of CCA are encouraged to attend to discuss and vote on the 2013 budget, to hear reports on our church's ministry, and to discuss any matters that arise concerning our church's life and ministry.

The sign-up sheets for this year's **CCA Friendship Suppers** will be available in the Fellowship Hall on Sundays. The dates this year are **February 2 and April 20**; all are on Saturday evenings. If you would prefer to have a sign-up sheet sent to you by email, or for more information, please contact Betty Phillips at (512) 451-5020 or at blphillipstx@yahoo.com.

The Outreach Board is sponsoring an **equipment drive** to benefit **Austin Groups for the Elderly (AGE)** in honor of Dr. Matt Blackstock. AGE requests the following items: shower chairs, transport wheelchairs, standard wheelchairs, rollator walker cane (single tip & quad), tub transfer products, incontinence items (all types, even if the package is open). Please keep the equipment drive in mind as you hear folks mention they are not sure what to do with a piece of equipment mentioned above. This equipment can be very useful to other people in the community, and folks who have it can easily donate it. If you have pieces to donate, please bring them to church and let AGE transport it to someone in need. If you have any questions, please contact Ranae Beeker at ranae-beeker@yahoo.com

AGE is in particular need of 20 wheelchairs. If you know of a serviceable wheelchair or would like to donate to a wheelchair fund, please contact Ranae Beeker at ranae-beeker@yahoo.com

Church Leadership

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

Personals by Pat Oakes

It was a joy to welcome ten (!) new members to the church on Sunday, Dec. 2. (A photo of all our new members is on page 5 of this newsletter.) **Bill Campbell** and **Victoria Li** have been attending our church since 2009. This is their first involvement with a Congregational UCC Church. Bill has been in Austin since 1979 and is originally from New York and New Jersey. Victoria has been here since 1978 since coming from Taiwan. Both came to Austin to attend UT for graduate school and have had careers with the state and city ever since. Between them, Bill and Victoria have six kids ranging from 19-28 years of age. Bill and Victoria both appreciate the church for its combination of a progressive message with a traditional service and the church's friendliness and its concern for social justice. **Joshua Sabik** is a student at **Southwest Texas State** and lives in a co-op near the church. He is very interested in the whole idea of co-ops. **Walker Fountain** is a freshman from **New York** who is very interested in politics. He worked for the Obama campaign in high school four years ago and again this year. **Janet Parsons** has lived in Austin for 30 years, works at IBM, and volunteers at the Austin Zoo on weekends. She felt immediately at home in our church. **Ruth Koenig**, widowed several years ago, has come to us from Illinois to be closer to her son and his family. She taught English as a Second Language (ESL). She and her husband lived and worked in China for a year. Ruth is a new great-grandmother, and the father of her great-grand twins is one of Pat Oakes' former students! They live here in Austin, too, so there will be lots of baby time for Ruth. **Warrenda Harris** (in front of Ruth) is a lawyer new to Austin. Her husband **John** is a music and art teacher at the UT Demonstration School and they are the parents of 9-year-old **Alden** (3rd grade at Patton) and 4-year-old William. Warrenda's mom **Barbara Johnson** moved here from Louisiana to be closer to her grandchildren and is enjoying coming to services also. John's mother **Judy Harris** has also been to visit. **Kristen and Jason Parkhill** moved to Austin this past year. Kristen is an editor and Jason works with assessing values of low income housing. They are the parents of **Caleb**, 4, and **Zoey**, 9 months. Kristen's mom **Debby Kohrt**, a traveling nurse based in **Michigan**, has been to visit a number of times and Jason's parents and brother **Scott** came to visit over the Christmas holidays. **Amy Villwock** is in the process of reactivating her ministerial standing and is currently the **Director of Children's Ministry** at **St. John's Methodist Church**. We are all so glad to welcome them to the church family.

Dave and Sara Ross were very pleased to have their son **Michael** in town for the holidays from Florida. **Nodie** was also delighted as Michael sang in the choir while he was

here--joined by his brother **Andy** (oboe) and his wife **Leslie Poer** (French horn) who were playing in the **Joyful Noise Orchestra**.



The **Joyful Noise Orchestra** played for the service on Sunday, Dec. 23rd, and also included **Barbara Burnham** on piano, **Fran Briggs** on clarinet, **Nodie Murphy** conductor and also playing the flute, **Dave Ross** on recorder, **Sara Ross** on viola, **Julia Rosson** on flute, and **Robin Rosson** on cello. They did a wonderful job!



The Joyful Noise Orchestra rehearsed before church on Dec. 23, 2012, and gave a stellar performance during the service. Lower photo (l to r) Andy Ross, oboe, Barbara Burnham, piano, Robin Rosson, cello, Julia Ross, flute, Rambie Briggs, accordion.

Folks were delighted to see **Paul Deisler** visiting from Corpus with his daughters **Julie** and **Jane** on Sunday, December 23rd. Paul and Jane, both widowed last year, have had many visits from family in Austin and from Julie in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when possible, as well as from old

friends. **Paul** has joined the **Trinity Towers Rascals**, a newly hatched men's club that makes monthly outings that include lunch. Only about eight or so of the few male residents are able to show up, enough for good conversation. Jane and Paul enjoyed a family eating contest at the Omni Bayfront Hotel's Thanksgiving buffet last fall and they did it again this fall. They spent Christmas Eve at a gathering at his son **Conrad's** house here in Austin.



Paul Deisler delighted everyone at church by coming to visit while in Austin on Dec. 23rd. Shown here with daughters Julie, left, Jane, right, and Dave Ross.

John and Carol Burlinson's great and good news is that their son **Jake** returned safe and sound from **Afghanistan** on December 9. They celebrated their reunion with dinner at the **Stagecoach Inn** in **Salado** with he and his girlfriend, **Marisa**. He really enjoyed his first meal back in Texas - fried catfish with chocolate pecan pie for dessert. They also got to hear some fairly hair-raising MEDEVAC stories, which they are glad they didn't know about until he was safely back home. As for John and Carol...getting Jake's phone call telling them he'd arrived back in Texas lifted a huge weight from their shoulders. All of a sudden, it REALLY felt like Christmas!

Ranae Beeker was in **Nashville** enjoying an early Christmas holiday with daughter **Alethea** and son-in-law **Will**. She just flew there for the weekend but had a great time visiting music row and downtown **Nashville**. She also went to **Seattle** for a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday where she saw her sister, cousins, parents, and nephews.

It was a wonderful surprise on Sunday, Dec. 23rd, to see **Robynne Heymans**, our former Sunday school teacher, who moved to New York last summer. She is doing well, is a part-time nanny, and is volunteering at a children's community garden. She is living in a large house sharing with a couple and three other singles. She is looking forward to starting her landscaping business in the spring.



Ranae Beeker, front right, had a great visit at Thanksgiving with her sister Alane and nephews Lachlan and Owen.



Dennis Murphy enjoyed saying Merry Christmas to Robynne Heymans, visiting from the Big Apple--Dec. 23, 2012.



4 Former Sunday school teacher Robynne Heymans and current teacher Anna Kimberley had a good visit on Sunday, Dec. 23rd, 2012, while Robynne was in town from the New York.

Brazos Association News

January

by Liz Nash

I am pleased to share that the **Rev. Dr. Jennifer Ven- inga** will be installed as **Ecumenical Minister for Campus Ministry at St. Edward's University** in Austin on Sunday, January 27th at 1:30 pm. In addition to her full time work as **Assistant Professor of Religious and Theological Studies** at St. Edward's, Jenny is enriching the ministry of St. Edward's, a Catholic university, with her contribution to student ministry as a Protestant minister. This fall, she has led Taize services, a beautiful and deeply meaningful ecumenical worship service, among other work. Jenny has a **Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in Systematic and Philosophical Theology** from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She is a member of United Christian Church. I hope many of us will be able to celebrate with her on January 27.

Evangelical UCC in Lyons has called **Janice Kerlee** their interim minister following the retirement of **John Boydston**. Janice is a member of Faith UCC in **Bryan**,

and has come to us in ministry from the United Methodist Church, where she served local churches as pastor. We welcome Janice and hope that her ministry at **Lyons** will be a blessed time for our brothers and sisters in Christ there.

Our coming Association mission trip to **Back Bay Mis- sion** has confirmed dates now: **November 1-7, 2013**. We hope to take a work group between 20 and 30 people in size. I hope many of you will plan to join us for a time that will allow us to grow in discipleship and giving, as well as joining in the lifegiving and joyous work of Back Bay Mission. Just ask anyone who has been involved with their work. It is a tremendous place to go.

Blessings in Christ as we start the New Year,

Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister



Ten new members joined the church on Sunday, December 2, 2012. Left to right—Bill Campbell and Victoria Li, Josh Sabik, Walker Fountain, Janet Parsons, Ruth Koenig, Warrendra Harris, Caleb, Kristen, Zooey and Jason Parkhill and Amy Villwock.

We learned sad news through former choir director **Marie Scheel** and a friend in the Wednesday Morning Music Club. **Louise Whitworth**, 89, of Austin died Sunday, December 9th. No services were planned. Louise was the church secretary during the tenure of retired pastor **Yoshi Kaneda** and the first year of Tom's ministry. Louise worked at the church for nearly 10 years and remained a good friend of the church after her retirement. **Dave and Sara Ross** will particularly miss her as she was a longtime neighbor.



Marie Scheel with her good friend Louise Whitworth at the Advent luncheon at church, Dec. 16, 2006

Don and Sharon Brown report that this year they were delighted by the marriages of both their sons, **Greg** and **Andrew**. Their lovely daughters-in-law are **Luciana** (Greg) and **Sara** (Andrew) and are excellent matches for their sons. In mid-December they helped Greg and Luciana move into a house in San Antonio. To allow them to move to the Austin area, he was able to find a position with a VA clinic in San Antonio. Over the last few years he did his residency in internal medicine and worked for the VA in Albuquerque. Luciana is studying **Ayurvedic** medicine and knows herbs well. **Andrew and Sara** moved into their renovated early 20th-century house on East Second Street here in Austin last January. Andrew has his own law practice, the **Brown Firm**, and **Sara** is a nurse practitioner in an Austin clinic. Don and Sharon say they are truly blessed. After months of Sharon's working on the recent successful campaign, they were happy to fly away to **Buenos Aires** where they tangoed, walked, ate, and shared activities with other friends. They met all of them at their tango classes here at **Esquina Tango**, a precious non-profit for dance, culture, and women. They enjoyed two and a half weeks in the beautiful city with the kindest people they've met on their many travels.

Mary Towery Masters, daughter of **Pastor Emeritus John Towery** and his wife **Eleanor**, reports that their son **Ricky's** wife **Monica** successfully weathered a double mastectomy after being diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after becoming pregnant. **Monica** (with Ricky's support) was determined to keep the pregnancy, so opted for the surgery which had to wait until she was in her 2nd trimester. Happily, the surgery went well, the pregnancy is ongoing, and everyone is very hopeful that the cancer was caught early. The baby is due in the spring. We are keeping them in our prayers. John and Eleanor celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary on December 9.

Jeri (Winter) and **Ray Gradecki** are delighted to announce the birth of child number 2! **Korin Rae** was born Nov 16th. Korin and Jeri will likely be in church on Sunday, Jan 13th. Ray has graduated from nursing school and is looking for a job. Jeri reports that big brother **Wylan** is doing a very good job in his new capacity.

Dennis Schneider, a member of the church some 30 years ago, writes from **Tokyo** that his daughter **Takako**, her husband **Robert** and their little boy, were coming for Christmas!

The Scotts, Eliot, Felicia, Skye, 6, and Sterling, now 4, send their best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Eliot is enjoying his new job with **Brown University** in **Providence, Rhode Island**. Skye is enjoying ballet and Sterling has started soccer. Felicia continues with her on-line teaching courses.



Annie, Ellie, and Becky Nash with Olivia Vaché decorating tables at the Christmas dinner for the homeless.



Getting ready to serve Christmas dinner at church--Dennis Murphy, chief dinner wrangler Christie Kuhner, and Victoria Li.

Tom VandeStadt reported that the church served between 100-150 folks Christmas dinner--he got varying reports from different volunteers. Special thanks to the merry and enthusiastic volunteers who included **Christie Kuhner** who was the chief organizer, the entire **Nash** family, the entire **Howicz** family (Tess helped during the service by lighting the Christ candle), **Beth Placek** and her friend **Dave**, **Bill Beardall**, **Robin Chapman** and **Alex VandeStadt**, **Whit Bodman**, **Barbara Sterling** and **Bob Brander**, **Jo Jensen** and her husband **Bob Garrett**, **Dennis Murphy**, **Isabelle**, **Marilyn and Olivia Vaché**, **Cecile Adam** and her family, **Victoria Li** and **Bill Campbell**, plus a number of folks who are not members of the church who just came to help. Many thanks to church members and others who brought food. Extra special thanks to **Victor Cardenas**, who set up the **Appel Room** for the occasion.

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408 West 23rd Street
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Return Service Requested

Deadline for February Visitor — Jan. 21, 2013



The choir, led by **Nodie Murphy**, sang an anthem with our Sunday school children on Dec. 9, 2012. The adult choir includes: back row: **Don Miles, Bill Mueller, Dennis Murphy, Sara Ross, Rambie Briggs, Joe McMillan, Norma Hawes**; front row: **Shannon Quisenberry, Fran Briggs, Cathy Hubbs, and Amy Harris**; The children include (l-r) **Caleb Parkhill, John Dietz, Isabella Dietz, Scarlett and Juliet Quisenberry, Tess Howicz** (hidden behind **Nodie**), **Francesca Dietz, Harrison and Savanna Tucker**.