

# THE VISITOR

February 2012

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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## Pre-Lent Book Reading *Insurrection*, by Peter Rollins

In preparation for Lent, I invite you to read and then join me in discussing Peter Rollin's most recent book, *Insurrection*. In this book, Rollins reflects on Jesus' words from the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" In Rollin's view, Christians are not called to simply remember and commemorate Jesus' crucifixion on the cross, but to experience the agonizing abandonment of God that Jesus experienced on the cross. Passing through this threshold of abandonment, this crisis in faith and meaning, opens up the possibility for a new experience of God in Christ through resurrection. Here's an excerpt from his book:

While in the Garden of Gethsemane we witness the sacrifice for religion, on the Cross we come face to face with the sacrifice of religion. In the sacrifice for religion, Christ loses everything for God, while in the sacrifice of religion, Christ loses everything *including* God.

Let me be more specific: What is lost here is a way of relating to God as *deus ex machina*, as some being "out there" who ensures life makes sense. On the Cross, Christ becomes the absolute outsider. Everything that has supported him thus far has been stripped away. The religious system of the day sought his execution, the political system happily provided it, and his social circle quickly abandoned him. All that would ground him had been fundamentally shaken apart. There is no support here for Christ. On the Cross he is left naked, alone, dying.

Rollins, *Insurrection*, 27

In this book, Rollins is deeply indebted to the letters Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote towards the end of his life while in prison. In his prison writings, Bonhoeffer began to critique Christianity as a *religious* phenomenon, particularly the way the Christian *religion* constructed God as *deus ex machina* ("god out of the machine"), referring to a technique used in Greek tragedies whereby stagehands lowered a god onto the stage with a crane in order to resolve an otherwise untenable plot development.

For Bonhoeffer, the Christian *religion* constructed a God that resolved our gaps in knowledge and comforted our anxiety over such things as illness and mortality by promising an afterlife free of stress, illness, and death. In Bonhoeffer's view, believing in such a God had nothing to do with being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and he began to develop a notion of religionless Christianity, one that abandoned all metaphysical constructs of God and focused instead on following Christ unreservedly in this world. Unfortunately, the Nazis executed Bonhoeffer shortly before the allied powers defeated Germany, and Bonhoeffer was never able to fully develop his ideas. Here's a taste of Bonhoeffer's writing:

And we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in a world *etsi deus non daretur*. And this is just what we do recognize—before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15: 34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we continually stand. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers From Prison*, 360

It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is *metanoia*; not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isaiah 53. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers From Prison*, 361

To be clear, Bonoeffer did not say God does not exist. He said the God we construct with our metaphysics, and the God we construct to assuage our existential fears and anxieties, that God does not exist. The God we see in Christ—the God who exists for others, loves others, suffers for others, and dies for others—that's the God that exists. It's this theme that Rollins develops in his book.

While Rollins' book isn't dense or filled with philosophical and theological jargon, it is nevertheless challenging. Not everyone will agree with him, but some may resonate powerfully with the *experience* he describes—the agonizing loss of meaning, the painful outgrowing of religious beliefs and theologies, the existential faith crisis, and the new life that we can have in following Christ as his disciple. The book is available on-line, at some local bookstores, and on Kindle. If you'd like to read it, please do so in time to meet for discussion after worship on February 12 and 19.

#### THANKS FOR THE 10<sup>th</sup> YEAR CELEBRATION!

Thanks so much for the 10 year anniversary celebration on January 29: for the song, the awesome cake, the beautiful flowers, the card, and the generous gift within the card. I'm so grateful for the ten years I've spent with all of you. You've helped me deepen my spirituality and grow in so many ways. I just hope that I've returned the favor in some small way in your lives.

Thanks again! With much love,  
TOM

### Upcoming Justice Forum on Health Care April 15, 2012

**A**t this moment, children, young adults, seniors, and people with longstanding health challenges are experiencing greater access to health insurance coverage than ever before, thanks to the **Affordable Care Act**. That momentum will continue as the new health reform law approaches its full implementation in 2014, unless something happens to roll back the success that health care advocates worked decades to secure. The threat remains very real, as those who oppose the law resort to distortions and even fear tactics to make their case. What we need is for more Texans to really understand the ACA and how it affects each one of us.

The **Center for Public Policy Priorities**, in collaboration with **Children's Defense Fund of Texas**, **Texans Care for Children**, and **Engage Texas**, will fill us in on all the details on April 15, 12:30-2 p.m., in the CCA sanctuary. We will learn what our health plans will look like, who gets to design them, and how they'll be paid for. It's important that we as Texans be informed and aware of these developments as they happen so we can have a say in our health care future.

The presentation will discuss changes in **CHIP** and **Medicaid**, exactly what is in the law, how it is already impacting our lives, how it will affect us in the future, and how we can stay informed and involved. We will acquire the tools we need to stay informed, follow developments, as well as educate and mobilize our friends and neighbors.

### Support the Hill Country Ride for AIDS

**Tom VandeStadt** and **George Hetrick** will be riding in the **Hill Country Ride for AIDS** in April. This is a fund-raising event to raise funds for a number of organizations that provide services to people living with AIDS, including The Care Communities. Both Tom and George will be riding on The Care Communities Team. If you would like to support their efforts, please follow these instructions:

Go to [www.hillcountryride.org](http://www.hillcountryride.org)

Click "DONATE" link on the top left side.

Click green "DONATE TO A PERSON OR TEAM" link.

Follow the "SEARCH FOR PARTICIPANT" instructions by typing Tom VandeStadt or George Hetrick in the space provided, click on their name when it appears, then click the "CLICK HERE TO DONATE" link.

#### CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Trustees Chair	John Goff
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## Personals by Pat Oakes

Christmas dinner at the church on Christmas Day was a great success. Tom reported that the amount of food and the number of guests came out just right, with 110 total people served.

Everyone was delighted to see **Ned Murphy** and his wife **Faye** at the carol service and later at the open house at the Oakeses on December 18. Ned and Faye were in town between training sessions for Ned. They have now found a duplex at Fort Drum in upstate New York, where he is undergoing advanced mountain training to become a reconnaissance scout for the Army.



Ned Murphy with his wife Faye at the Oakeses' open house on December 18

Other Murphy news is that son **Seth** had a good visit with Nodie's family in New Orleans. Nodie and Dennis also enjoyed a week-long visit in mid-January with a former student of Dennis's when he taught at Drake University in Des Moines in the 1970s. Karen lives in Massachusetts and was in town doing some genealogy research at the Briscoe Center at UT in Austin and some field work in Bryan.

Keep **Matt and Mary Blackstock** in your prayers. He is undergoing treatment for a recurrence of melanoma which he was treated for several years ago. He would enjoy hear-

ing from you. Send cards to Blackstock, 2607 LaRonde Circle, Austin, TX 78731-5924 — or e-mail him at [blackstockm@att.net](mailto:blackstockm@att.net). Matt's 87th birthday is February 16th.

**Scarlett Quisenberry** took a tumble recently and did unfortunate things to her 2 front teeth--fortunately her baby teeth. Her teeth were still intact, but the roots were destroyed. After a visit to the dentist on January 24th, she had an early visit from the tooth fairy that night. Mom-Shannon points out wistfully that this is the last photo of Scarlett with a full set of teeth for some time.



Five-year-old twins Scarlett and Juliet Quisenberry at church on Sunday, Jan. 22, 2011.

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space provided, click on their name when it appears, then click the "CLICK HERE TO DONATE" link.

Our wonderful child caregiver, **Anna Kimberley**, is a senior at UT and this semester is doing an internship at the **Helping Hand Home** on 38th Street. She is working 20 hours a week and is coordinating volunteers and leading activities with children ages 4-13. The Helping Hand Home works with troubled children, was established in 1893, and is operating at its full capacity of 41 children.

**Paul Deisler** writes "At Thanksgiving, ten of us gathered at the Omni Hotel in Corpus Christi for the hotel's magnificent Thanksgiving Day brunch. My daughter **Jane** brought a can of sauerkraut with her, which the hotel heated and served to us along with a gravy boat full of turkey gravy. Sauerkraut and turkey gravy is a family tradition derived from the German side of Ellen's family. It helped to make the day. At Christmas, almost the whole family and their friends (including two large dogs, a puppy and several cats) gathered in Austin for a grand Christmas Eve dinner at my son **Conrad** and his wife **Julie's** house. On the way to Austin, Jane and I stopped to visit (in San Antonio), for the second time, both Ellen's and Jane's husband Shig's graves, which are close to each other. Christmas Eve morning, my younger daughter **Julie** and I visited my former French class at Central Market-North (a wonderful reunion with good friends) and on Christmas Day morning the two of us attended church, seeing more cherished friends and enjoying sitting in the familiar sanctuary. That evening, **Julia**, mother of my Austin grandchildren, had us out-of-towners to dinner. It was another wonderful evening, replete with great food. On our way home, we stopped at Cuero to visit Thomas, birth kin. His nine-year old cousin was there in the charge of **Auntie Lyzilla**, a very gentle, sweet elderly lady. The rest of the family were at work. That stop was a great pleasure and an excellent finale to our Christmas travels. During the first twenty months of Ellen's and my residence in Corpus Christi, I had hardly gotten to know my neighbors, as so much of my time was spent with Ellen. I miss those times with Ellen very badly. Now, however, I am beginning to pay attention to my immediate surroundings and have joined one of the residents' committees. It is time for me to begin to be part of the community in which I live. There are plenty of quiet times by myself, lasting for brief moments to several hours, when Ellen is with me, sometimes sadly, sometimes happily, as my memory strays. I will never fail to cherish all of them."

**Mary Towery Masters** reports that her folks, **John** (pastor emeritus of this church) and **Eleanor Towery** are very much enjoying being together after a separation of several months while John recuperated from a series of

falls. They are happy in their new "digs" at **The Cottages** in Round Rock. While it is getting harder and harder to get John and Eleanor places these days, Mary and Danny were able to take them to their home for Christmas dinner in Georgetown which was celebrated with **Ches and Maggie** and other local Towery family members. About 50 family and friends got together at **Mary and Danny's** son **Ricky** and his wife Monica's home for a great celebration of baby girl **A.J. Masters'** first birthday on Jan. 21st--a few days early, but A.J. didn't mind a bit! Mary also reported that **Sally Towery Johnson** and her daughter **Pam Johnson** were coming to Austin for a visit in early February--a celebration of **Sally's 60th** and **Pam's 40** birthdays. For the old-timers in the church who remember Sally as a youngster, this is hard to take!

**Elizabeth Freese** has finished her fall semester at **Drew**



Happy New Year wishes from Elizabeth Freese and Talley Summerliin and their daughters Rose and Vivian, Jan. 2012

**University in Madison, New Jersey**, and is looking forward to her second semester. She is working very hard, classes are going well, she got to attend a conference in San Francisco, and to see and meet many of her idols in the **Religion and Ecology** field while there. The girls are busy with their various "things." **Rose** is doing school chorus and robotics, **Vivian** loves math and will soon start an African dance class, and both are continuing karate lessons and drawing. Even when it is cold and dark (which is a lot, it seems), they still like to play outside with their Drew U. friends before dinner--especially if there is snow. They also enjoy their weekly visits to the Madison public library (incredibly good) and **Stanley Congregational**

**Church** (incredibly welcoming – though they do miss their *Congregational Church of Austin* friends dearly). **Talley Summerlin** is doing a great deal of cooking and childcare, but is able to keep working from home with **En-viroMedia**. Musically, things are going very well as Talley nears the completion of his EP and plays shows occasionally – including a really fun one on the Drew campus recently for Elizabeth's birthday with all her new Religious Studies friends (wild!). The pastor at Stanley Congregational and some other new friends are also serious singer/songwriters, so he's got some partners in crime. They have all survived a hurricane, an earthquake and an unexpected, heavy early snowfall which caused almost a week of power outages. They have enjoyed some days trips and have had family come to visit. All in all, things are going well.

**Mary Sinclair and Richard Jackson** report that their Christmas was shared by Richard's cousins **Paul** and wife **Nora** who live in **London and Manchester, England**. They spent a week with them en route from **Fiji**, the latest stop on their round-the-world tour. They've been travelling since mid-August spending several months exploring Australia and New Zealand, and then a couple of weeks in Samoa and Fiji. Mary asks us to imagine the shock of arriving in quiet, and very cold, **Heidelberg** (Ontario) after such an exotic and warm location! They did a fair bit of touring in the area, with the requisite stop to see **Niagara Falls** (quite beautiful in winter) and days in **Toronto and Stratford**. They had a lovely Christmas with them and it was nice for Richard to have his family around him when they are usually surrounded by Mary's. The cousins went back to **Manchester** for a few weeks and then they're off to Colorado for a couple of months of skiing. After that, who knows?

**Jake Burlinson** is doing some training with his unit in New Mexico. He is hoping to get a three- day leave to come home some time in February. His unit will be deployed to **Afghanistan** on March 10.

**Suzanne Vanderpoel** had a fun visit with her grandsons in Katy in early January. She watched her 16-year-old grandson **Tanner** swim in a very fast swim meet. Nineteen-year-old **Ty** was on winter break from freshman year at Texas A and M, where he's enjoying (?) Calculus II and the cadet corps. The last big project of his vacation was to design and construct his outfit's flag (guidon) since he wants to be the guidon leader. It looked great, so of course the sophomores stole it the first day back at school! Suzanne is working at learning bizarre, cult-like Aggie traditions and secretly hoping he'll come to UT for grad school. Doesn't UT have an outstanding environmental engineering program? She had a lovely time and was delighted when the boys surprised her with a birthday cake.

Former church pianist **Aaron Carter-Cohn** was already planning to come home for Christmas from his studies in **Nigeria** when the universities went on strike in November. When he decided to leave, there were protests going on in his neighborhood (outmatched by tanks, teargas, army and police) and his commitments were finished for the year, so he came home. It's gotten a lot worse since he left, so it was a good decision. He had a great time over the holidays in Ohio with his sister, brother-in-law, and twin nephews. Aaron promises to write again soon and tell us what his plans are for the future.

**Lois and John Drachenberg** are happily settled into their new home, having survived a stressful move with John's back problems and Lois's continuing balance issues. Members of their church pitched in to help. They love their new digs and are delighted that they are now closer to their



John and Lois Drachenberg on St. Patrick's Day, 2011

church and doctors' offices. John says that they are in **Seminole** county where **Scott Pelley** on "**60 Minutes**" reported on the large numbers of homeless people in the area. They have not seen evidence of this, but their church is very active in programs to help. Their new address is 528 Royal Palm Drive, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701 and their phone number is 407-341-7771.

**Mel and Pat Oakes** are looking forward to a week of visits around Valentine's Day from daughter **Beth** and her family and **Pria Sarma**, Beth's best friend since the 4th grade. Beth is coming to town to perform with the **Austin Chamber Music Center the weekend of Feb. 17 and 18**. If you are interested in the performances, go to <http://austinchambermusic.org/calendar/021812-fifth-wheel> to see about ticket information. She will arrive several days early to rehearse and **Eugene, Ethan and Emily** will come on the 16th. Friend Pria and her two young boys will

## Brazos Association News

February 2012

by Liz Nash

The **Brazos Association Church and Ministry Committee** met, at its January meeting, with **Greg Felder**, pastor of **Friedens Church of Washington**, and voted to work with him on the ordination process. This will be a first for the **Brazos Association**, since Greg will be on an “alternative path to ordination.” This means he will begin a program of preparation for ordination in a different way than seminary training while continuing as the full time pastor. Greg has been serving as a Licensed Minister in our Association for several years as the **Associate Minister at St. John's UCC in Burton**, and now in Washington. He has also served on Church and Ministry, and is appreciated as a colleague and friend among our ministers. During the past two **General Synods** of the national UCC, delegates approved this path to ordination requiring an Association to work with a candidate on an individual program of training. Our **Church and Ministry Committee** has set up a committee to work in partnership with Greg using the UCC “**Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry**” comprehensive list of standards and goals for ministers to assess where further training is needed and to decide how this can happen. The committee will support and evaluate him in this work. This work will be a new challenge for all of us who are involved in the process, and will help us consider in new ways the faith commitments, character traits, skills, and expectations for all who are in ministry.

We anticipate having youth from several of our churches attend the **UCC National Youth Event** next **July 10-12**, to be held at **Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana**. Our Association has been setting aside budgeted money each year to help our youth attend, and our Executive Board will be deciding how to distribute scholarship money by the end of this month, most likely to fund transportation costs. In order for us to be able to make money available for all who will be going, we need to know as soon as possible which churches will be sending youth with an estimate of how many will be going. If your church has youth who will be going and if you have not already been in touch with me about this, contact me at [lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com) or at (512) 231-0045. Information about **National Youth Event** can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/youth/nye/>.

For our churches looking for a nearby mission work trip, the **International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)** is recruiting volunteers for **IOCC Action Teams**, working in partnership with **Habitat for Humanity in Houston**. Volunteers should be 18 and over, with certain restrictions.

IOCC has two work dates set for Houston on **June 10-16** and **August 5-11, 2012**. For more details on this opportunity, see our **January 13 South Central Conference** e-newsletter or go to [https://www.iocc.org/giving/giving\\_volunteer-orthodoxactionteam.aspx](https://www.iocc.org/giving/giving_volunteer-orthodoxactionteam.aspx)

### Upcoming important dates:

Plan to join us at the **Association Spring Meeting** at Friends Congregational Church on Sunday, **April 22**, 3 pm through dinner time. We will gather for worship, business, fellowship, the **Ecclesiastical Council of Beth Gleason**, and one or more additional Ecclesiastical Councils if additional candidates are ready at that time. Our Church and Ministry Committee will meet next on Thursday evening, **March 22**, with the location to be decided. Our ministers' next “**Jam and Bread**” meeting will be at **St. John's Burton** on **Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup>**.

Blessings in Christ,  
Liz Nash  
Brazos Association Minister



Skye and Sterling Scott on Christmas morning at church.

arrive that weekend, so it will be a really full house! In other Oakes news, daughters **Beth** (Iowa City) and **Sarah** (Arlington, Virginia) met **Mardie** (San Francisco) in Scottsdale, Arizona, for a long weekend to celebrate **Mardie's** upcoming 40th birthday. Beth and Sarah were excited to see Mardie in her current pregnant state (**Baby Boy Deifell** is due May 3) and Pat and Mel were delighted to have a long video Skype call with all three girls at once.

Our CCA confirmands, Cameron Goff, Emily Howicz, and Katie Lemley, kicked off their spectacular **Confirmation Can-Formation on Sunday, January 15**. Their goal is to line the entire perimeter of the sanctuary with canned food, and to donate the food to the Micah 6 food pantry. This is what things looked like on Sunday, January 22.



On the first Sunday of the confirmand's food drive, Cameron Goff and Emily Howicz collected about half a wall's worth of canned goods.



Don Brown, Matt Blackstock and Cameron Goff were hard at work setting out canned goods for the confirmand's food drive.

### Micah 6 Youth Drop In Center Volunteers and Furnishings (still) Needed

We are still looking for volunteers to act as hosts for our Street Youth drop in center which opened on Jan. 22. The center is at University Baptist Church from 2-6 each Sunday. We aim to have volunteers work in teams of 4 once each month on a flexible schedule. We will provide a welcome, hospitality, and serve dinner for our guests.

We need donations of Sunday evening meals for the kids, and a microwave oven. We encourage you to join in this outreach to our homeless youth neighbors by volunteering or donating.

Contact Liz Nash if you are interested or need more information at [lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com).

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

Return Service Requested

## Deadline for March Visitor - Feb. 23

### February Calendar

**Friendship Supper** will be held on **Saturday, February 11**. If you have not yet signed up and would like to attend, or if you need to CHANGE any information on your previously completed sign-up sheet, please call or email Betty Phillips at (512) 451-5020, [blphillipstx@yahoo.com](mailto:blphillipstx@yahoo.com).

On February 12 and 19, Tom will host a discussion of the book ***Insurrection*, by Peter Rollins**. If you'd like to participate, please pick up a copy of the book and begin reading it so you can be prepared to discuss it in February.

**The Micah 6 Street Youth Drop-In Center** is looking for volunteers to act as host once a month. Beginning January 22, the center will be open from 2-6 each Sunday at University Baptist Church. We aim to have volunteers work in teams of 4, once each month, on a flexible schedule. We still need donations of computers, flat screen monitors, microwave ovens, and a large blender. Contact Liz Nash if you are interested or need more information: 231-0045 (home), 799-2782 (cell), [lizknash@gmail.com](mailto:lizknash@gmail.com).

**Greg Futch** is teaching a class based on Bill Plotkin's work, *Nature and the Human Soul*, at the Servant Leadership School of Austin on Thursday evenings, 7 pm, from **January 12 to March 15**. You can register for the class by e-mail at [SLS.of.Austin@gmail.com](mailto:SLS.of.Austin@gmail.com) or by phone at 512-524-5145.

The **Zen and Politics** group meets every Wednesday at 5:30 pm at University Baptist Church. Contact Tom at [rev-tomv@swbell.net](mailto:rev-tomv@swbell.net) for more details.

**James Anderson Student Recital—Saturday Feb. 4th @ 2pm** (at the church)

**Waterloo Trio performs at Caffé Medici** Downtown (2nd and Congress)

February 4th @ 11am

February 11th @ Noon

February 18th @ Noon

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