

THE VISITOR

March 2012

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

Several weeks ago, Bill Beardall and I participated in a worship service in which local students spoke out in support of the Dream Act. These students were brought to this country as young children, have lived in this country for most of their lives, and in most cases have received their entire education in the United States. But because they're not legal citizens, they face legal obstacles to pursuing higher education, accessing financial aid and scholarships, and finding jobs.

These students were articulate young people who had asked themselves the question, who am I capable of becoming and what am I capable of doing in this life? What gifts, talents, and skills do I embody? What are my deepest aspirations, my calling, my dreams? Who am I now, and who can I become? What must I do to become the person I have the potential to become?

What was profoundly hopeful yet painfully agonizing about hearing these young people speak was that while they've identified their gifts, talents, and skills, they're legally prohibited from developing them within our nation's educational system. While they've identified their aspirations, calling, and dreams, they're legally prohibited from pursuing them within our society. These bright, energetic, and articulate young people have identified who they feel capable of becoming and what they feel capable of doing with the life they've been given, yet our legal system and broken immigration system obstructs their efforts to fulfill their God-given human capacities.

I think one of the most essential questions we can ask ourselves is this: who am I capable of becoming and what am I capable of doing in this life? And as we've seen with these young people, another question may immediately follow: what's preventing me?

Thomas Merton famously asked this question in his book, *Raids on the Unspeakable*.

"If you want to know me, don't ask me where I live, what I like to eat, how I part my hair; rather ask me what I live for, in every detail, and ask me what in my view prevents me from living fully for the thing I really want to live for."

What Merton really lived for was becoming the fullest, most complete, most mature version of Thomas Merton he could possibly become. In Merton's view, that's how we glorify God, by becoming a human being living in full bloom. Yet even one as deeply devout and spiritually mature as Thomas Merton acknowledged that there were things in his life preventing him from blooming to full capacity. Again, therein lays one of the deepest, most essential, and most profound dynamics of our human spirituality: what am I capable of becoming and what am I capable of doing in this life, and what's preventing me?

Have you, in a place of silence and stillness, in an environment conducive to deep self-reflection, and with an attitude of radical truthfulness and self-love, asked yourself questions like, what are my deepest, most wholesome, most holy human capacities, and what would my life be like if I fully developed them? What are my deepest aspirations? What does my soul most passionately desire to express? If I were to mature as the fullest and most complete expression of myself, what would that look like? And what is preventing me?

With the Dream Act students, I witnessed youthful responses to these questions: I love physics, I'm really good at physics, and I want to go to college to study physics and mechanical engineering so I can develop solar panels, but my legal status is preventing me from accessing financial aid and scholarships, and my family doesn't have enough money.

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But as we age and mature in life, and as our spirituality deepens, we may begin to discern deeper and more profound capacities stirring within us, spiritual capacities that lay far deeper than the more obvious skills, talents, and interests that we embody and, if we're lucky, develop and put to use throughout our professional careers and while pursuing our hobbies. These deeper spiritual capacities or impulses, experienced as creativity, loving-kindness, compassion, or wisdom, if allowed to surface and given expression, may allow whole new dimensions of our lives to bloom in ways we never anticipated. Yet they may also bump up against our most deeply engrained habits of thinking and acting, or our most deep-rooted fears and insecurities, or the expectations that society and significant others place upon us or that we place upon ourselves. And in doing so, we may obstruct the expression of our own souls, thereby denying ourselves fuller bloom of our God-given gifts.

Carl Jung observed that most of us wear shoes too small for us. It's a beautiful image, though a sad one as well. What he meant is that most of us live lives too small for our souls. We live lives too small for the full expression of the deeper human and spiritual capacities within us, too small for the full blooming of the creativity, loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom that our souls harbor. We're capable of far more holiness than we're aware of and far more than our lives actually express. In no small part, because of our deeply engrained habits, our fears and insecurities, and the expectations placed upon us.

Who am I capable of being and what am I capable of doing in this life? This is a deep and profound question. And what's preventing me? An equally deep and profound question. I think the way our society obstructs certain young people from fulfilling their dreams by denying them legal access to higher education and employment is tragic. But so is the way any one of us obstructs our own deeper spiritual capacities and impulses because we're overly attached to our habits and fears, and to the expectations placed upon us.

Lent is all about preparing ourselves for new life by taking a close look at the life we're currently living. Please use your Lent to find some time in a place of silence and stillness, an environment conducive to deep self-reflection, and with an attitude of radical truthfulness and self-love, ask yourself some deep and profound questions.

TOM

**DEACONS TO LEAD DISCUSSION IN
MARCH ON THE CENTER FOR
PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY'S
"EIGHT POINTS"**

In the month of March, the Board of Deacons will host a discussion on The Center for Progressive Christianity, with a particular focus on "The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity." Each week in March after worship, a Deacon will present two of the eight points for discussion. These discussions may lead to a further church-wide discussion regarding whether the Congregational Church of Austin, UCC, should join The Center for Progressive Christianity.

For more information on TCPC, visit their web site at www.tcpc.org. On the upper right-hand side of the opening page, you'll see a link that reads: "What do we mean by 'progressive Christian?' Read the 8 Points." If you'd like, click that link to read the Eight Points prior to joining the discussion.

We need additional **Porch Lunch** volunteers. You're invited to join other CCOA members and friends who volunteer to prepare lunch for at-risk youth who are served by the Lifeworks program housed at CCOA. We prepare a healthy lunch twice a month (the first and third Thursday of each month) from 11 am – 1 pm. If you're interested in volunteering please contact Kathy Whatley at ucausti@swbell.net. We rotate the schedule with three people per lunch, so you're only "on duty" every few months.

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

Personals by Pat Oakes

Keep **Matt Blackstock** and his wife **Mary** in your prayers. Matt is in hospice care in his home because of the recurrence of melanoma which he struggled with in 2010. While he is not really up to receiving visitors, he very much enjoys phone calls and cards. His phone number is 512-459-6595 and the address is 2607 LaRonde Circle, Austin, TX 78731-5924.

The **Tucker Goodgame** clan went to **Quebec** for the **Winter Carnival** at the end of January and the beginning of February. They took the kids out of school to go see the snow, but they still had homework to do every day. **Savanna and Harrison** couldn't get enough of playing in the snow. They went skiing for two days and the kids learned to ski. They visited a hotel made of snow and ice. People actually paid to stay in the hotel at night on an



Savanna, Harrison, and Pam Tucker as Eskimos at the ice hotel in Quebec

ice bed. It was probably 10 degrees F inside! At the Carnival, there was an ice luge ride, an inner tube ride down a very long hill, and an inflatable raft ride down a big hill and, of course, an ice castle as well as snow and ice sculptures. They had a life-size foosball court where they got strapped onto a horizontal pole to compete. They also got into their swimsuits in the hot tubs at the Carnival. Harrison's favorite was jousting other kids in a ring with a padded pole. There were sleigh rides, dog sled rides and armchair races on skis. They had a great time.

Hannah Norton paid us a surprise visit on Sunday, February 12. She is enjoying her job as a librarian at the University of **Florida Health Science Center in Gainesville**. While she is much missed in our choir, she is singing in the choir at her church (UCC of Gainesville--a big church with 700 members) and 2 community choirs. She has also

gotten into the sport of rock climbing. She saw **Sarah Gourlie Gale**, another good friend from our choir, in Alexandria, Virginia, in August. and reports that Sarah and her husband are doing well. Sarah could not talk much about her work with Hannah as Sarah is working for the Office of Naval Intelligence.



Hannah Norton surprised Nodie Murphy and the rest of us when she visited church on Feb. 12

Bill Phillips is looking forward to having a book of his poetry published by the end of March. The name of the book is: *The Oyster Stuffed Locker*. It will include about forty poems. Bill will be bringing some to church for "show and tell." Be sure and ask him about it.

Fran and Rambie Briggs (who live out by Lake Travis) report that they can see that the lake level is slowly rising thanks to the good rains we have had in the past two months. They were able to take their grandchildren, **Stella** and **Giovanni**, out in the boat recently, something they had not done in a long time. Sadly, the lake level is still down about 40 feet with the lake capacity at about half.

Beth Gleason, our seminarian "in discernment", spent two weeks this January in **Guatemala**, studying "Long and Short-Term Mission Models" through the **Austin Presbyterian Seminary**, where she is a senior student. The seminar studied a variety of church-sponsored and non-profit mission models including water purification projects, infant/child nutrition projects, and church hostels that would house US groups doing short term mission work in Central America. The experience enriched her commitment to mission work, as well as changed her perceptions about the immigrant experience in America, which has resulted in a new spontaneous ministry to the Austin immigrant population seeking work at I-35 and St. John's St. She got to

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swim in a cenote, an underground cave spring, among a number of adventures. Beth says, " Viva Guatemala! One of the most beautiful and poorest countries in the world."



APTS professor Cuellar (far left) and four APTS students (Beth Gleason is 2nd from the right) enjoying a "cenote" or underground cave spring.

Marie Scheel, 97, and former director of the choir for many years, is doing well at her home in South Austin (which she and her late husband moved into in 1948). Marie has recuperated from her fall last fall, although her right hand (she injured her thumb) is not as strong as it was before she fell. She continues to do physical therapy to improve her strength, enjoys the fact that Meals on Wheels delivers tasty meals 5 days a week, and is glad of the helpers who come by 2 times per week to help her. Give her a call--she loves to hear from folks.

Barbara Burnham has had surgery for a macular hole in her eye. Actually, she had the condition in both eyes. Originally the surgery was planned for the right eye, but the left eye declined very quickly, so that was the one repaired. It was done on February 2 under anesthesia. Part of the procedure involved the insertion of a gas bubble in the eye, so for two weeks she had to spend most of her time with her head down, to position the bubble correctly. Within a week the macular hole was closed, but she had to continue to position the gas bubble until the bubble itself disappeared after another week. She's been back at work since the 3rd week of February. Barbara is so grateful for all the help and encouragement she has received! So many people called, sent e-mails or notes, and provided food and companionship during what would otherwise have been a difficult (and boring) time. Of course, she'll still have to have surgery on the right eye at some point, but for now it seems to be stable.

Wave to **Joan and Bill Mueller** when you drive MoPac between 35th and 41st. They are getting settled into their fourth floor apartment at the north end of **Westminster**

Manor senior residences. Their new address is 4200 Jackson Ave, #4013, Austin, Tx 78701. They have the same phone number, 356-9339 and their e-mail is the same joanmueller36@gmail.com, billmueller28@gmail.com.

Carol and Fred Scott are moving back to the Midwest, specifically to the condo they still own in **Prairie Village, Kansas** - just a mile from Kansas City, Missouri, and five miles from the Plaza, an area high on the visitor list. This is a bittersweet change for them, as there is so much they treasure about their years in Texas. Their home in Georgetown was not on the market, but Carol has a realtor friend who knew they were experiencing some frustration about the drive to Austin -- traffic is so challenging. They head to Austin at least twice a week and it wasn't getting any easier. The realtor was aware they would either return to the Midwest or look for something in Austin one of these days. She asked if she could show their house to a client friend who had just sold her home with lots of acreage. The lady loved it and made a good offer. Carol and Fred will be heading north toward the end of March. Their new address is 7221 Mission Road #206 Prairie Village, Kansas 66208. Their cell phone numbers are 913-226-5822 and 913-486-6930. We will miss you!!

John Camden was at the **Austin Chamber Music Center** concert which featured **Beth Oakes** as one of the performers. John reports that **Cathy** and her husband **Scott Staerker** live in the Houston area with their 2 children, **Sarah**, 14, and **Andrew**, 10. Cathy is an aerobics instructor and Scott works for BP. **Laura** is at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff where she is an assistant professor of photojournalism. John is completing his last semester at St. Ed's where he has taught computer science for a number of years. He is looking forward to retirement and is planning on spending more time at his 81 acre ranch near Giddings. Currently his neighbor in Giddings is leasing the land to run cattle.

We haven't seen a lot of **Randy Sarosdy** at church in recent months, but he is doing fine--and is in great shape. He has been doing a lot of training for various triathlons. While doing his bike training he occasionally sees Tom and Robin. He just did a triathlon on Feb. 18th in Corpus Christi with his son **Frank**, who's also his coach. Frank came in first overall in the sprint distance (750 meter swim, 12.5 mile ride, 3.1 mile run) and Randy won his age group and finished 33 out of 95 overall in the Olympic distance (1500 meter swim, 25 mile ride, 6.2 mile run). They swam in **Corpus Christi Bay**. It was windy as usual in Corpus. Their next race is in Kemah in April. **Frank** and **Randy** are both doing Olympic distance in that one.

Mel and Pat Oakes had a marvelous week in mid-February. Daughter **Beth** came in from Iowa on the 14th to start rehearsals for the performances with the Austin Chamber Music Center that next weekend. Son-in-law **Eugene** and **Emily**, 11, and **Ethan**, 8, came on the 16th, and Beth's best friend since the 4th grade and her 2 sons



Beth, Emily, Mel, Pat, Eugene, and Ethan at church on Feb. 19, 2012

(10 and 7) came in on the 17th from New Jersey. The four kids played and played and the grownups visited and visited. Pat had been predicting that there would be large amounts of rain when she had four kids in the house--and there were between three and four inches--but the kids were entranced with creating videos and other electronic feats, so it was not a problem. The weather cleared on Sunday and Monday so there was time for playing at **Zilker Park** and riding the **Zilker Zephyr**. Emily and Ethan pronounced that the music at church on Sunday the 20th was terrific--lots better than their church!

Rich (who served as interim pastor between **Yoshi** and **Tom**) and **Jane Thompson** were delighted to meet some old Austin friends from the tennis group started by **John Towery** many years ago. They met up at Rich's son **David's** ranch in Kenwood, California. **Don Hauck** was visiting **Mona and Jim Fitzsimmons** (who built a retirement home in Sea Ranch). They were on their way to Sonoma wine country and stopped by for lunch. It gave them an opportunity to meet Rich and Jane's new grandchild **Lucas** (their 11th between the two of them) who was adopted by **David** and his partner **Luis** last year.



The Confirmation Can Formation was almost all the way around the church by Feb. 26th



Lolita and Jesse Binford donated the chairs their children enjoyed to the nursery at church. We know the children will have a great time playing on them.

Brazos Association News

March 2012

by Liz Nash

On February 4-11, 7 people from Brazos Association churches joined 6 people from **First Congregational Church of Council Bluffs, Iowa** for a mission trip to **Alegría**, El Salvador and the surrounding area. Travelers from our local churches included **Judy Sherman, Ronnie Stanley, Carol Montgomery, and David Greer** from St. John's UCC in Burton; and **Robynne Heymans, Cindy Locke**, and myself from **Congregational Church of Austin**. The trip was sponsored by the South Central Conference (with the Conference's blessing, but we raised funds through our churches). Our joint trip began as all of us met in Dallas for the flight to San Salvador, after lots of emails and conversations. We were picked up in San Salvador by our good friend, **Oscar Rodriguez**, who does full-time outreach work in **Alegría for Iglesia Bautista de Emmanuel** (Emmanuel Baptist Church) in San Salvador. Oscar and **Tom Neilsen**, pastor of the Council Bluffs Church, have been leading these trips together for many years. We spent the first night in San Salvador, then attended worship with a very warm welcome at Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel. Afterwards, we traveled to **Alegría**, where we spent Sunday through Thursday nights at a welcoming and comfortable hostel.

Our work/construction projects included a water catchment project at a home in the San Juan II community and a painting project at a former school that is now a community and worship center in the community of San Juan I, both rural and poor areas. These two communities are above **Alegría** on a dormant volcano. Both require trips on roads constructed from the stone excavated as the roadway is dug, making for a somewhat bumpy and steep ride with magnificent views. Both projects involved working side by side with local residents and workers – we marveled at their skill and resourcefulness.

The water project was down a steep path from the road to a one room house (surrounded by others like it) with corrugated metal walls held up by a frame constructed by branches. The people who lived there and those from surrounding houses carried water down from much higher on the mountain in several trips for the concrete pad (reinforced by stones excavated at the site) that would go under the water tanks, which were also brought in by hand along with bags of cement, a generator, tools, welding supplies, and everything else that was used. We struggled to get up and down the path, while the local people carried all of these things. We worked with them to level the ground, haul stones to the pad to support the water tanks, mix (on the ground) and shovel concrete, dig a ditch for an out-

door sink and drainage, and help the workers add a metal roof structure to the house to drain rainwater into the tanks. Both projects were finished on Wednesday. All of the members on the trip also joined in other activities that spring from the long history of these trips to the area, including going with a doctor (**Rebecca**, a US doctor who supports her own work) to her clinics in two very rural, poor villages in the **Rio Lempa Valley** (below **Alegría**) where there is no other local access to medical care; taking school supplies to two schools in the same area and presenting those to students, teachers, and local officials; taking school supplies way up the volcano to the school in San Juan II; and presenting clothes to people (a congregation) at a reunion in a community center those on this trip helped build last year. Children sang to us at the schools, and in return, we led them in the “Hokey Pokey” – when we all got to be kids for a moment!

After returning to San Salvador Thursday afternoon, we spent Friday visiting the chapel where **Bishop Oscar Romero** was assassinated in 1980, his very simple living quarters across the driveway, the memorial chapel at the **University of Central America (UCA)** to the Jesuit priests and their caretakers who were murdered there in 1992, the museum memorializing the religious martyrs of the **Salvadoran Civil War** (lasting from 1980-1992), and the seaside town of **La Libertad** with its teeming fishing dock. **Sister Mercedes**, a Carmelite nun, gave us a moving account of Bishop Romero's life and the beginning of the great violence of the war while we visited the chapel where he was killed. We ended the week as 13 friends who shared an extraordinary experience of Christian discipleship. We hope to make this trip again with more friends from the South Central Conference.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister

The Sunday afternoon **Micah 6 Street Youth Drop-In Center** is now looking for people to bring in a meal for our guests. We are asking for a hot, tasty meal with a hot vegetable and dessert -- similar to what we want for freeze night but to feed a larger group (up to 25, though our group has been about 12-15 so far). The meal is served around 4 pm on Sundays. Our aim is to have each of the **Micah 6** churches provide one meal every two months, but we have a calendar to fill now, so more help is welcome. Contact Liz Nash for a calendar and more info on this and on volunteering as a Drop-in host. lizknash@gmail.com.



A restoration project is underway to make repairs to the tapestry that has hung over the altar for more than 30 years. **Christy Kuhner, Barbara Burnham (behind Christy), Sara Ross, Dave Ross**, taking photos for the creation of a grid to use in the future), **Fran Briggs**, and **Nodie Murphy**. Also on the committee are **Jaime Hadley, Pat Oakes and Nancy Edison**. The goal is to have the repairs done during Lent and the tapestry re-hung for Easter Sunday.

Christian Outreach Board's Justice Forum

The **Christian Outreach Board's** next **Justice Forum** is scheduled for **April 15**, from 12:30 to 2:00 pm in our sanctuary. The Forum will cover information on Health Care. At 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 details regarding 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 cover 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, 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

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.

The Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at The University of Texas at Austin, just opened the exhibition *The King James Bible: Its History and Influence*.

Throughout the semester, numerous related programs, events, and tours are planned at the Ransom Center. We hope that members of your congregation may take the opportunity to see visiting national and international speakers and view this exhibition at the Ransom Center, which is one of only two U.S. venues. Next Thursday, March 8, Robert Alter, Hebrew scholar, translator, and critic, presents "The Question of Eloquence in the King James Version" at 7 p.m. in Jessen Auditorium in Homer Rainey Hall.

The Kings James Version is famous for its eloquence, and there is much in the translation that justifies that label. But in his talk, Alter considers the ways in which this eloquence might or might not be akin to the stylistic force of the original, whether there are notable differences between this English rendering of poetry and prose, and whether there may be lapses in the eloquence.

The event, presented by the Ransom Center and the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, is free and open to the public. Seating is limited. Line forms upon arrival of the first patron, and doors open 30 minutes in advance. A live webcast of this program will be available at www.hrc.utexas.edu/webcast.

Information about the exhibition, future programs, and booking a tour, is available at <http://budurl.com/univorg>.

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

Return Service Requested

Deadline for April Visitor - March 23

March Calendar

The CCOA women's book club will be reading **Season of Migration to the North** by **Tayeb Salih**. If anyone has a book to lend, please bring it to church at the earliest convenient Sunday, but before **March 20**. We could use several copies.

Please join **iACT, Church World Service**, and the Austin community for the **Austin Crop Hunger Walk** on **Saturday, March 3, at 10am**, and on **Sunday, March 4, at 2pm** at Walter E. Long Park (6614 Blue Bluff Rd., Austin, TX). Even if you're not on a walk team, you can still register at the event, or just enjoy the day with your friends and family.

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 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 revtomv@swbell.net for more details.

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is having a workshop **Saturday, March 3**, taught by Seton Hospital chaplains to provide training for "non-professional care-givers" about care-giving. The workshop is \$20/person, and is designed for clergy, laypersons, Stephen Ministers, care teams, etc.