

THE VISITOR

March 2013

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

408 West Twenty-third Street, Austin, Texas 78705-5214

(512) 472-2370 Fax: (512) 472-1175

E-mail: ucausti@swbell.net Web site: <http://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/>

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

We began our Lenten journey this year with a reflection on St. Jerome's observation: "the desert loves to strip bare." The desert wilderness was a significant geographical site for the ancient Israelites and some early Christians. In Hebrew scripture, we read that after liberating them from slavery in Egypt, God led the Israelites through the wilderness where they were subjected to fierce testing. In the first three gospels, God's Spirit led Jesus, in Mark's gospel *drove* Jesus, into the wilderness, where Satan tested him. Some early Christians, living in a society beset by mounting corruption and growing instability, felt led or driven by God into the desert wilderness to purge themselves and to undergo a form of death and resurrection.



In antiquity, many people feared and avoided the desert wilderness because of its extreme desolation and privation. It was a harsh environment nearly devoid of life, and what did manage to live there was strange and dangerous. The desert wilderness was that place *that was no place* on the other side of the boundary that separated the safe, habitable, civilized human world from the unsafe, uninhabitable, inhuman world. It fueled the human imagination as the haunt of demons and the devil's home.

So why did some of our spiritual ancestors feel led, or driven, by God into the desert wilderness, and why is the desert wilderness such a foundational and powerful motif for Lent? Because "the desert loves to strip bare." As we expressed in our opening liturgy the first Sunday of Lent: "By its

overwhelming emptiness, its unnerving silence, its fierce indifference, the desert loves to strip bare; to remove from us with its chastening winds our masks, our facades, our charades; to expose to us with its glaring light our fears, our insecurities, our fantasies. The desert, not a place of comfort, but one of challenge, a place with nowhere to hide, where wind and light expose to us who we really are, moving us beyond denial and avoidance to confession."

To enter the desert wilderness is to leave behind human civilization and to be stripped bare of the entire world of human constructions. This includes the physical world we've built, the inter-subjective world with all our beliefs, attitudes, and meanings, and all the political, economic, social, and cultural systems that shape and channel our lives. The whole human project in which we live and move and have our being, and that we internalize, carry around inside our heads, and accept as real—the desert strips all this away.

To enter the desert wilderness is to enter empty space where one is compelled to deconstruct *everything* we humans have constructed. And more personally, where one is compelled to subject one's own identity to radical deconstruction. This can have a profoundly liberating outcome. But to get there, one must submit to a process that's profoundly disorienting, and thereby profoundly challenging and even painful. Strip bare everything that supports life as we know it, remove everything that supports our identity as we know our self, and what do we have left?

Continued on page 2



Precisely. That's what people enter the desert wilderness to discover: what they have left once all is stripped bare, once every distraction is removed. What some discover is God's grace, a more radical faith in God's grace, and a more authentic identity that's rooted in God's grace and liberated from social convention and self-centered ego.

Looking at Jesus as he's portrayed in the gospels, being stripped bare is one of the predominant characteristics of his life. His life is stripped bare of all human constructs, all the typical human ways of thinking and acting, and he's left with absolutely nothing but a radical faith in God. And yet, stripped completely bare, he's the most liberated person alive.

One could argue that this is ultimately *the* message of Jesus Christ, the *Way* of Jesus Christ. Be stripped bare of everything—possessions, self-centered ego, power over other people—with absolutely nothing left but a radical faith in God, love for God, and love for neighbor. This is giving up one's life to truly gain it. This is entering the kingdom of God. This is the liberating truth that will set one free.

Clearly, we're not all going to move out to some windswept barren patch of sand outside Van Horn, Texas. But that's not to say we can't incorporate a portion of desert wilderness practice into our own on-going Christian discipleship. We can incorporate desert wilderness practice into our on-going Christian discipleship. Something that strips us bare, at least a bit. Something that deconstructs, at least a bit, this constructed world in which we live, and this constructed identity in our heads. Some on-going spiritual discipline, like prayer or meditation. Regular acts of renunciation. Fasting. Increasingly simplifying one's life by making on-going sacrifices. Going on retreats. Actually taking off and getting away from it all on a regular basis. I actually do go to Van Horn, Texas, once or twice every year to purge my head and heart in that West Texas desert wilderness.

However we do it, incorporating a desert wilderness type of spirituality into our lives is a profoundly helpful way to submit ourselves to God's transforming power. Some would argue that it's required. Even Jesus had to go through it. I pray that the desert may strip us bare in some way.

TOM

Church Leadership

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

Austin Philharmonic Orchestra Spring Concert

The Austin Philharmonic Orchestra will present its free Spring Concert Wednesday evening **March 6, 8:00 pm at Congregation Beth Israel 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd.** The program features the Mozart Piano Concerto No. 17 with **Felicity Coltman**, guest soloist.

Also on the program, **Gabrieli Sonata Pian' e forte**, featuring antiphonal brass and **Grieg Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 and 2.** For more information see the Austin Philharmonic website: <http://www.austinphilharmonic.org>

Personals by Pat Oakes

Hildegard Kuehne Everett was a long-time member of the church--and her father **Dr. J. M. Kuehne** was an early member of the church and on the physics faculty at UT. Her family was part of the early German community here in Austin. Many years ago she taught me how to make Easter eggs the way the early German settlers in **Fredericksburg** did--using bluebonnets and onion skins. Because of the drought this year, there won't be many bluebonnets, so give onion skins a try. You will need the papery part of onion skins (yellow or red--I have never tried white--don't know if that works!) or 5-6 bluebonnets per egg--plus as many uncooked white-shelled eggs as you would like. You will also need strips of cloth and straight pins. Carefully holding an egg in one hand, arrange the papery onion skin around the shell, holding it as tightly as you can and covering as much of the egg as you can. Take a strip of cloth and wrap it as tightly as possible around the egg, covering the onion skin and the shell. Secure the end of the cloth strip with a straight pin, taking care not to pierce the egg! Place the eggs (onion ones in one pot and bluebonnet ones in another), Cover



with cold water, bring to a boil, boil a minute or so and then let them sit in the boiling hot water for 30 minutes or so. Then run cold water over the eggs and remove the cloth strips. The onion-dyed eggs will be lovely shades of yellow, gold, and brown and the bluebonnet eggs will be a pale greenish/gray/blue with imprints of the flowers in delicate blues and greens and flecks of pink or purple.

Pat Oakes

Doris Williams had a wonderful time on her trip to D.C. for the second inauguration of **President Barack H. Obama** (she was also at the first one!). Her daughter **Crystal Parr** lives in D.C., so Doris had a place to stay--and they had a great visit in addition to taking the sights related to the inauguration. They made a special visit to

the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial**--especially appropriate as inauguration day fell on **MLK Day**. Doris traveled by charter bus departing on January 19, 2013, and arriving back in Austin on January 23. It took many hours to get there and back, but it was worth it. The best thing about the trip was all the excitement surrounding the event. It was a coming together of people from all walks of life to celebrate the re-election of President Barack Obama.



Doris Williams and daughter Cris at the Presidential Inauguration on January 21, 2013.

We have been sorely missing **Fran and Rambie Briggs**. **Rambie** has been ill since mid-January. After several hospital visits, many tests, and lot of doctors looking at him, it was determined that he had pericarditis, an inflammation of the lining around the heart. He would enjoy hearing from folks--send a card to 22017 Redbird Drive, Lago Vista, TX 78645-7301 or send him an e-mail at rambiebriggs@att.net. **Rambie** reports that **Fran** has been absolutely wonderful taking care of him!

John Goff spent most of January on **Long Island**, conducting survey work to assess changes to the seafloor caused by **Superstorm Sandy**. The goal was to ascertain the impact of the storm on the long-term evolution and health of the barrier island system, which protects the coastal environment and communities. The first two weeks were spent on an 80' research boat offshore along the south shore of Long Island. The weather was surprisingly mild and calm for this work, which was much appreciated. The last week was spent in a small boat on Hempstead Bay. The weather turned bitterly cold with two snow storms, and they had to cut the survey short because they couldn't do deck work. They also got a bit of press while they were out there, including a full-length NPR segment,

which can be heard at:

<http://www.npr.org/2013/01/29/170567082/sand-after-sandy-scientists-map-sea-floor-for-sediment>. In addition to Cameron getting his driver's license in February, they had two birthdays: Megan turned 13 on February 4, and Gail turned 47 on February 6. A sadder milestone was that their cat Jack passed on; he was a good cat.



Ned Murphy with his dog, Jack .
(photo taken during training, not in Afghanistan)

Ned Murphy is serving in the Dog Troop in Afghanistan. Take a few minutes and send him a note. His e-mail address: sxelysium@yahoo.com and snail mail address:

PFC Murphy, Benjamin
B-TRP, CTF Wolverine
FOB Super FOB
APO AE 09311

New member **Josh Sabik** customarily drives his car to **Texas State University** in San Marcos and then rides his bike from the commuter parking lot to his



Beth Placek listening to Josh Sabik tell about his scary encounter with a truck--2/10/13

classes. Unfortunately, on Feb. 7 he had a run-in with a truck in the parking lot which is crowded and cramped such that it is very difficult to see around corners. The accident happened about 10:45 in the morning and he was in the hospital with his broken arm and banged up leg by 11:15. Josh says that everyone was very helpful, fire trucks and an ambulance came to help him, and he was transported to the hospital by ambulance. Josh noted, when asked, that he was not wearing a helmet--he made an immediate vow to get one! It will take about 6 weeks for his arm/wrist to heal.

The **Freese/Summerlin** family was in Washington, D.C on the weekend of **Feb. 17** to take part in the **Keystone XL** protests on the Mall. Talley reports that there were more than 40,000 people there--and that it was very **COLD!**



Rose and Vivian Freese-Summerlin with their mom Elizabeth Freese in D.C. for the protest rally against the Keystone XL pipeline--2/17/13 Photo by Talley Summerlin.

It was good to see **Laura Hubbs-Tait** in the congregation on February 10th. She was in town to see her mom **Cathy Hubbs** after attending a conference on maternal and infant health in Washington, D.C. The two had a great visit.

Whit Bodman writes, "I am only teaching one course this semester - Islam and Christian-Muslim Encounter. It will be different this time around - more theological. We read a bit of the Qur'an every class, on something connected to what we are talking about, at least so far. With the time I am not spending teaching the other course, I have two commitments. First, I am getting serious about a book on the Qur'an that has been sitting around for a long time. Much to say about that, but some other time. It is time to get it done. Secondly, I am working with **Texas Impact**. Our **UCC South Central Conference** is a member of Texas Impact, so we are too, indirectly. I am on the Board, though I represent the seminary, not the Conference. Texas Impact lobbies the state legislature on behalf of religious judicatories and organizations. These include all the Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Disciples and Presbyterian Churches, the Texas Quaker Meeting, and several Muslim and Jewish organizations are members-at-large. And there are others. We have a legislative agenda that includes restrictions on payday lending, supporting better access to SNAP benefits and local agriculture, increasing access to health insurance, especially through the Medicaid Extension, improving the criminal justice system, especially concerning treatment of youth offenders and administrative detention (solitary confinement) and more. You can read all about it at <http://texasimpact.org/content/about-texas-impact>. We have also just initiated a partner organization, the **Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy** with a new board there, on which I sit. And did I mention that we also just bought a building? And I probably forgot to mention that we just started a capital campaign to pay for that. Oh, and we just hired a new staff member, and have two new interns. Oh, and legislature is in session, and I am testifying before the State Affairs Committee tomorrow on the sharia bill. And did I mention that I am the Vice President? A Very Exciting Spring!" Whit, you certainly are busy! It is clear your open heart surgery didn't do much to slow you down!

Ranae Beeker started her new job in **Bremerton, Washington**, in early February. She is also pleased to report that she has bought a cute, small, recently updated home built in 1954. Her offer was accepted on the second time around, although she is still waiting for the mortgage to be approved. The new address is 3012 Ryan Dr. Bremerton, WA 98310. Her son **Gavin** has a new job nearby with Digipen, a school for video gaming, in nearby **Redmond**, where he is sharing an apartment with 7 others. Ranae notes, "Aah, to be so young!" He is loving his job and Ranae is delighted to have him close by. Ranae is missing us all and sends her love.

We have all been missing **Jonathan Geer** as he gets over a rough January into February with various illnesses. On Feb. 10, the choir celebrated the Sunday before Mardi Gras with a jazz service. Nodie had arranged for a pianist to play--and it turned out that she is not only a marvelous jazz pianist but a great singer. **Lisa Clark** had the sanctuary in the palm of her hand when the service opened with Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday." She is the daughter of bass player and arranger **Buddy Clark** and moved to Austin from L.A. eight years ago. She also writes music in a variety of styles--from jazz, adult contemporary pop, inspirational and children's music.

Julia Deisler is pleased to report that *Gypsy Grove Foods* products are in several Austin stores. The Crestview Minimax has Julia's "Everybody Wants It" Toffee, Julia's Caesar and Gypsy Knots. They will soon be bringing the Chimichurri on board. **Toffee and Gypsy Knots** are at **Royal Blue Grocery** on 3rd and Lavaca and at both **Breed & Company** locations. **Wheatville** carries Julia's Caesar salad dressing. Julia asks that everybody say a prayer, because **Spec's** is considering her products as well!! We don't see much of Julia as she is working 3 jobs--including getting **Gypsy Grove Foods** up and going. In addition, there will be a wedding in the family. Daughter **Ava** is marrying **Donald French** on March 23rd here in Austin.

Hill Country Ride for Aids

Spring is just around the corner, which means Pastor Tom has hit the road to train for the **Hill Country Ride for AIDS** in April. He will be riding for **The Care Communities Team**, and going for the 100-mile distance. The Hill Country Ride for AIDS is Central Texas' largest fundraiser to raise money for service providers who are helping people living with AIDS. One of the service-providers that benefits is The Care Communities. Our church has an active Care Communities "Care Team" that is helping some folks meet their basic needs every week, including that of friendship. Each rider must raise hundreds of dollars to participate. In the past, you've been very generous, and Tom has raised over one thousand dollars. He's hoping you'll help him again this year (or for the first time if you're new to the church).

If you would like to support Tom's fund-raising efforts, please go to <http://www.hillcountryride.org/> and then click the "DONATE" link. Then type "Tom VandeStadt" in the "look for participant" field. When you see Tom's name appear towards the bottom of the page, click it. You'll then come to Tom's fund-raising page, where you can click the "DONATE" link.

George Hetrick will also be riding on The Care Communities Team this year. Thanks to all of you for your support!

Amplify Austin A Community-Wide Giving Day

Three DAYS AND COUNTING to Austin's first community wide on-line giving day: Amplify Austin! The goal is to raise \$1 million in 24-hours from **7 pm Monday, March 4 until 7 pm Tuesday, March 5.**

Amplify Austin is your chance to amplify your contribution to iACT by sharing information about iACT on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) during this historic 24 hour campaign.

With recent changes to Facebook only a small fraction of people who have "liked" our Page see our posts. This is true for all organizations involved in Amplify. So, we need your help to increase our exposure! Like, Comment, Share and Retweet our posts about AmplifyATX! We'll make it easy for you by providing compelling stories and images throughout the day that tell the story of iACT: People of all faiths doing good together.

Amplify iACT at 11!

Additionally, we are asking our friends to specifically donate between 11AM and Noon on Tuesday so that we can qualify for one of several "hourly prizes" - either \$1,000 for most unique donors and/or \$1,000 for the most dollars donated.

Check our website for more information: <http://interfaithtexas.org/donate/amplifyatx/>

Keep your eyes on **iACT's Facebook page** and follow us on Twitter for continuous updates as we Amplify Austin!

Mission 4/1 EARTH

For those of us who feel called to affirm God's creation and take on environmental faith projects, the UCC is sponsoring "Mission 4/1 Earth" between **Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday** (April 1 to May 19).

This is a challenge for our UCC churches to collectively offer more than one million hours of engaged earth care (clean up, advocacy, education and behavioral changes); collectively plant more than 10,000 trees locally and globally in partnership with the **Arbor Day** foundation and denominational partners; and collectively send more than 100,000 advocacy letters on environmental concerns. See <http://www.ucc.org/earth/about.html> to join this effort.

LIVE A Multi-Media Experience

Sunday, April 21, 2013 | 12:00-2:00pm
1909 University Avenue
Austin, TX 78705
Reserve Your Tickets Today
Tickets: \$15/Family or \$5/person
100% of proceeds go to Micah 6 Austin
Lunch will be provided

On Sunday, April 21 University Avenue Church of Christ and University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will present LIVE - a multimedia experience for families of all ages where kids AND adults will learn virtues and make friends together.

LIVE is a special family event that will raise money to benefit **Micah 6 Austin**. Our prayer is that this event will not only raise a significant amount of money for Micah 6 Austin, but will also be a blessing to families helping them grow closer to God together and closer to the larger Christian family in the Austin area.

For more information and to reserve tickets visit: <http://www.ualive.org>

Tours of Juvenile Justice Centers In March

In Texas, thousands of young people aged 10 thru 16 are processed through the juvenile justice system every year. In 2011, the Texas Legislature made significant changes to the system designed to keep more youthful offenders in their local communities. The new law means local faith leaders have new opportunities to support and guide youthful offenders and their families- and it starts with understanding the system. Join Interfaith Center staff on tours of the juvenile detention centers in San Antonio and Houston. Learn what happens to youth when they are picked up by the police, what conditions they are held in, who is available to help them navigate the often-intimidating criminal justice system, and where faith communities fit in.

San Antonio—Friday, March 1, 10 am: Bexar County Juvenile Detention Center and Cyndi Tyler Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center

Houston—Friday, March 15, 10 am: Harris County Juvenile Detention Center

Space is limited! Please RSVP as soon as possible. If you know someone that you think would like to attend, please forward this email along. Please email cindy@texasimpact.org to RSVP or if you have questions or need more information.

Brazos Association News

March

by Liz Nash

Here's a reminder and an invitation. Our **Brazos Association Spring Meeting** will be on Sunday afternoon, **April 7th**, at **St. John's UCC** in Burton. We normally begin at 3 pm and end with dinner, although St. John's will send out an invitation to our churches with details and RSVP needs. All of you are welcome to join us for an afternoon of fellowship, worship, meeting, and program. The UCC, at our best, combines autonomy of churches, the freedom of Christian belief, covenant between members and churches, and mutual care in a creative way. The work and fellowship in our Association is the primary way we have to be in warm and uplifting covenant with other UCC churches. Our twice yearly Association meetings are the major places where that happens. So, I encourage you to join us. I have the privilege of working with many great folks from our churches, and I know you will enjoy the friendships that grow as we meet.

At our January Church and Ministry committee meeting, we licensed **Janice Kerlee** and granted UCC standing to the **Rev. Amy Villwock**. Janice is the interim pastor of **Lyons Evangelical Church** and **Friedens UCC** in **Gay Hill**. Janice began her time in care/in discernment with our Association last fall. She has a Master of Divinity from **Perkins School of Theology** at SMU and comes to us from the **United Methodist Church**, where she has served churches as a licensed local pastor. She is a member of Faith UCC in Bryan. Amy is an ordained UCC minister who serves as **Director of Children's Ministries** at **St. John's United Methodist** in Austin. She has previously served churches in California, as well as working as a teacher, before moving to Austin. Amy is a member of Congregational Church of Austin. We welcome Janice and Amy as ministers serving in the Brazos Association.

For those of us who feel called to affirm God's creation and take on environmental faith projects, the UCC is sponsoring "**Mission 4/1 Earth**" between **Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday** (April 1 to May 19). This is a challenge for our UCC churches to collectively offer more than one million hours of engaged earth care (clean up, advocacy, education and behavioral changes); collectively plant more than 10,000 trees locally and globally in partnership with the **Arbor Day** foundation and denominational partners; and collectively send more than 100,000 advocacy letters on environmental concerns. See <http://www.ucc.org/earth/about.html> to join this effort.

Finally, I invite all of you to our Association mission trip to **Back Bay Mission** on **December 1-7, 2013**. (This corrects a date error I made in an earlier article – I apologize!) For those of you who have never been to Back Bay, you are in for a great experience at a truly lifegiving place. And for those of you who have been there, you already know what a great place it is. The cost is \$120 for lodging at the Back Bay dorms and for program, plus money for food that we can cook and share as a group and money for transportation. Back Bay is a day-long drive from our area, and we will carpool. It is also possible to fly into **Gulfport, Mississippi** for anyone who might need to do that. Those who plan to go will need to pay the Back Bay fee in September. More information will be coming soon about how to reserve your place on our trip.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash,
Brazos Association Minister

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

Return Service Requested

Deadline for April Visitor — March 21st



Jaime Hadley doing one of his favorite church jobs, changing the paraments for Lent.



Steve Domingue, our new financial secretary, with Pam Tucker, our outgoing financial secretary at church on Feb. 10th.



Doris Williams visited the recently unveiled statue of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while in Washington D.C. for the inauguration.