

THE VISITOR

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

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

On February 24, I participated in the **Interfaith Environmental Network** and **iACT** co-sponsored **“Preach-Off on Climate Change.”** Speakers representing the **Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Unitarian,** and **Christian** traditions spoke for five minutes each, offering a religious response to climate change. A few folks from our church came to listen to the speakers, but I thought I’d share my remarks with all of you. What follows is my five minute “sermon,” which I entitled *Taboo Subjects*.

Taboo Subjects

I’ve got five minutes to get your attention, so here goes: Sex! We can’t talk about climate change without talking about sex. The Latin root of the word sex—*secare*—means “to cut off,” or “to disconnect from the whole.” To “be sexed” literally means “to be separated from the whole.” Our contemporary world is highly “sexed”—preoccupied with individual freedoms that sever felt connections and responsibilities to the whole. Being “sexed” is a root cause of our climate change crisis.



Thomas Berry and **Joana Macy** call our era the commercial-industrial age. We separate ourselves from the earth by objectifying nature into commodities that we exploit to build elaborate artificial environments in which to live, work, play, and worship, and to create unnatural processes like industrial agriculture and meat production to sustain ourselves. We have “sexed” ourselves from nature. We live less like citizens of our planetary home than as strange unnatural aliens who’re unable to communicate with the other natural residents of earth or abide by earth’s natural laws.

Derek Jensen writes, “Play me three notes of *Stairway to Heaven* or *Freebird*, and I can name that tune, but play me a symphony of bird songs I hear each day, and I have no clue as to their origin or meaning. How could I possibly expect to integrate myself as a citizen into the community I at least call home if I can’t be bothered to learn even their spoken or sung languages?”

We have segregated ourselves from earth in a manner that’s harmful for us and every other natural citizen of this planet. **William Kittredge** observes, “isolate us from nature too long...and we start getting nervous, crazy, unmoored, inhabited by diseases we cannot name, driven to thoughtless ambitions and easy cruelties.” **Alistaire McIntosh** adds, “people who know nothing of nature are of course neurotic, for they are not adapted to reality.” Having “sexed” ourselves from nature we have “sexed” ourselves from reality itself. How long can we live disconnected from reality?

In Latin, the word religion means “to reconnect.” A lot of religion seems preoccupied with sex these days, though in a manner that’s strictly below the belt. Religion should be preoccupied with sex—in a manner that reconnects us to reality, to the fundamental reality that we humans emerged from the *humus*, from the sea and soil of planet earth.

Our blood and bones contain elements of star dust and sea water. We exist as interdependent beings in complex webs of relationships with other humans, plants, and animals, with the sun, the seas, and the soil. Our future is inseparable from the larger whole that brought us into being and sustains us. Religion should be preoccupied with reconnecting us to the larger whole.

I began by raising one taboo subject, sex, so I'll end by raising another one. One far more taboo than sex: capitalism. If our religions are to reconnect us to reality, than our religions must engage us in serious critiques of contemporary corporate and Wall St. dominated capitalism, because it operates under the assumption that we can continue to "grow the economy," consume the earth, and accumulate wealth without restraint. This, of course, is insane. Disconnected from reality. Through overconsumption, we're outstripping the planet's ability to sustain life, and we're filling the land, sea, and air with the deadly poison of our waste.

Yet we do treat capitalism as if it's a taboo subject. As if we'd provoke the wrath of God by even questioning a system that intentionally stokes our desire to take more, consume more, and waste more, a system that enables the 85 richest people on earth to control half the world's wealth, a system that's killing species so fast that, in **Bill McKibben's** words, "we're running Genesis backwards." How long can we run **Genesis** backwards? Shouldn't that be taboo?

Poet **Wendell Berry** writes, "Once there was nothing...not even nothing. Think of that." Yes, think of that. Once there was nothing. But now we're graced with this experience of being alive together in this beautiful garden. If we're to continue experiencing life, we must undergo a profound transformation of heart and awakening of mind. Deepening our appreciation for the garden as the matrix of life from which we arose, and our sense of awe that we exist at all. Honestly facing up to the harmful consequences of living as if we're separate from the garden. And devoting our lives to reconnecting ourselves to the whole, because the whole is holy. In other words, in all of our traditions, we must fulfill the truest meaning of the word, "religion."

Tom

Lenten Silence

Once again this year, we'll be observing silence during the beginning our worship serviced during the season of Lent. During the Season of Lent, please enter the sanctuary and prepare yourself for worship in silence. Use the silence and stillness as a time for personal reflection and prayer. Shortly after 11:00 am, the Trio will begin playing a reflective piece. If at this time you would like to tie a prayer cloth to the prayer net, please do.

Church Leadership

Trustees Chair	John Goff
Deacons Chair	Jaime Hadley
Outreach Team	Marilyn Vaché & Warinda Harris
Moderator	Barbara Burnham & Bill Beardall
Treasurer	Gail Christenson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Christian Education	Rachel Dietz
Coordinators	Martin Garrison
Clerk	Betty Bodman
Historian	Jaime Hadley



(l-r) Beth Gleason, Charlotte Albert from St. Peter's UCC in Coupland and Liz Nash in El Salvador.

CCA YARD SALE

for our

EL SALVADOR MISSION—DATE TBA

An all-church spring yard sale to raise money to relieve hunger in El Salvador

PLEASE BRING ANY DONATIONS or CONTRIBUTIONS, LARGE OR SMALL, TO THE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP HALL ANY SUNDAY IN MARCH

More information forthcoming.....*gracias!*

Personals by Pat Oakes

Our church family suffered a sad loss with the death of **Lolita Binford**, 85, on February 6th. **Jesse** (her husband of almost 59 years,) and Lolita had been active members of the church back in the late 1950s and returned to the church when they moved back to Austin after many years at the **University of South Florida**. She and Jesse, had been in church just a few weeks prior to her passing. The next week she suffered a heart attack and Jesse's health took a sudden turn for the worse (he was treated for a benign brain tumor some years ago and it came back). They were both in the hospital at the same time and were sent home within days of each other. They so wanted to be together. We are all so grateful that **Cecile Adam**, chaplain at **Seton Hospital**, was able to visit them often and was a great help to the family. She and Tom led the service at the church which was held on Saturday, Feb. 15. Many thanks to the many folks who helped with the reception in the fellowship hall following the service. Jesse is currently in hospice care—it is such a sad time for the family. Both of their sons (**Lincoln** and **Jason**) and their families live here in Austin.



Roger Lytle's christening took place on February 1, 2014. Left to right—Heather's brother Alistair (godfather of Roger), Zac's grandfather John Lytle, Heather's parents Valerie and William Sponsel, Heather, Roger, and Zac Lytle (not shown is Roger's godmother Vanessa Lively)

Cyndi. Greg reported that everyone was healthy, big brother **Alex** was managing OK, and that he and Margaret spent the last half of February in Denver to give all the help they could as Matt had a business trip to **Turkey** that he could not refuse!



Tom VandeStadt with Lolita and Jesse Binford at the church barbecue in August 2007.

It was a joy for the congregation to participate in the service of baptism for 5-month-old **Roger William Lytle**, son of **Heather and Zac Lytle**. Heather and Zac have worshiped with us over the years as they made their way periodically to and from **Dallas** (where Heather has been in medical school) and **San Antonio** (Heather's hometown). Family members gathered in Austin on February 1st to celebrate the occasion. Roger charmed everyone by eventually nodding off to sleep as the ceremony progressed.

Greg and Margaret Futch are delighted to announce the arrival of their second grandchild, **Riley Lorraine Futch**,³ the daughter of their son **Matthew** and daughter-in-law



Miss Riley Lorraine Futch made her debut on Jan. 30th.

Mary (Towery) and Danny Masters enjoyed a trip to **Florida** recently, so your correspondent checked in for the Towery report with new grandfather **Ches Towery**. He allows that being a grandfather is wonderful, but that he feels a bit older! He and **Maggie** had a belated Valentine's **Day** celebration with **Kendra, KC**, and baby **Benjamin Chesley**, and **Aunt Krystal** on the 23rd as Ches was sick the week before. His parents, **John** (pastor emeritus of this church) and Eleanor are holding their own at this

Brazos Association News
March
by Liz Nash

On Sunday, March 2nd at 3 pm, **Lyons Evangelical UCC and Friedens, Gay Hill, UCC** will host a service of installation for their pastor, **Rev. Darrin Holub**. This will be a celebration of Darrin's ministry with these churches and a celebration of his renewed ministry in the Brazos Association. All of our Association churches are invited, and I hope many of us will be able to come. It will be at **Lyons Evangelical UCC, 320 Silver Maple Dr.**, in Lyons. (A link to directions is on the **South Central Conference UCC** website.) The church will be providing a light meal afterward.

Our **Brazos Association Spring Meeting** is coming on Sunday, April 6, from 3 pm though dinner, at **St. Peter's Church of Coupland, UCC**. Once again, we have the privilege of having an **Ecclesiastical Council** for one of our members in discernment/in care, **Martin Garrison**. Martin's ordination paper is coming to all of our churches to allow people to read it before the meeting. As always, Martin will speak with us and we will have time to question him about his paper, his theology, his plans, and his faith pilgrimage before voting on whether to approve him for ordination. Our Ecclesiastical Councils are among the most important work we do at our Association gatherings, since the Association ordains ministers who can and do serve throughout the United Church of Christ. They are also wonderful opportunities for us to learn and to reflect on our own faith. In addition, we will have our business meeting, hear a bit about the past General Synod, hear plans for the upcoming South Central Conference Annual Meeting which our Association is hosting at **Camp Allen**, and (perhaps the best part) share fellowship and the current news of our church. Plan to join us!

As of the time I write this, we are just now completing plans for three seminary students and a faculty/staff member to visit churches in the Brazos Association on **March 28-30**. Our guests will be from **United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul)**, one of our closely related UCC seminaries and one of the CUE (Chicago, United, Eden) seminaries. Students **Mercy Monroe, Aaron Lauer, and Tom Major** will be coming, as well as Church Relations Coordinator and Interim Director of Development, **Rev. Kathleen Remund**. I am grateful to our host churches, **Hope United in Georgetown, Congregational Church of Austin, and St. John's**

UCC in Burton. We will look forward to hearing about the weekend, a great opportunity for sharing in faith, preaching, church life, and worship.

Rev. John Gage began his ministry at United Christian in Austin on Monday, February 17 and led his first worship as their Senior Pastor on Sunday, February 23. John was ordained by our Association as a member of **Congregational Church of Austin**, and returns here to his hometown in Austin after a long ministry at **United Church on the Green UCC in New Haven, Connecticut**. We welcome John and rejoice with United Christian at this new time of faith and growth in their life.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister



Beth sharing a laugh with new friends during the mission trip to El Salvador.



Be prepared--BYOTP! Joan Neilson, wife of Rev. Tom Neilson, co-leader of the trip with Charlotte Albert and Liz Nash during the mission trip to El Salvador.

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point. They both enjoy cards and notes, so do drop them a line while you still can. You can write to them through Mary at this address: 109 D B Wood Road, Georgetown, Texas 78628.



Lynne Lemley and John Goff unwrapping and placing the new chairs for the choir and classrooms— all 40 of them!

The Trustees authorized the purchase of new chairs for the church—for the choir and for classrooms. The choir is especially enjoying their new ones with arm rests and a shelf under them for music. Many thanks to **Jaime Hadley** who led the committee that made the selections.

Nancy Brown celebrated her 94th birthday on Sunday, February 16th. While she was not in church that Sunday,



Beth Oakes with Nancy Brown the week before Nancy's 94th birthday.

the week before she was and had a good visit with everyone including Beth Oakes who was in Austin visiting her parents. That Sunday we also remembered Matt Blackstock who would have been 89 on the 16th.

Tom VandeStadt and **Steven Fogelberg**, the senior rabbi 5 at **Congregation Beth Israel** helped coordinate a



Tom VandeStadt is a pastor at The Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ, and Steven Folberg is the senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel. CONTRIBUTED BY IACT

very interesting afternoon at **Congregation Beth Israel** on **Sunday, Feb. 16th**. Austin's First-Ever **Interfaith Preach-Off on Climate Change for IACT** (Austin's Interfaith Environmental Network and Interfaith Action of Central Texas). Nine representatives from several faith traditions in Austin had 3-5 minutes each and spoke about their views on climate change using biblical or references from the Qu'ran, and a panel of judges offered words of support on their views, holding up placards with various words on them--"inspirational." "instructive." "compelling," etc. More than 75 folks showed up for the preach-off—and there is hope that it will happen again next year. Our church was well represented with six of us in the audience—**Ruth Koenig, Dave and Sara Ross, Jo Jenson, Robin Chapman, and Pat Oakes**. It goes without saying that **Tom** gave a stellar presentation.



Bill Beardall conversing with Whit Bodman after church Note that Whit is wearing a wooden tie. He pointed out that it was the only one he had that he did not have to tie!

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Whit Bodman was wearing a sling when he came to church on Sunday, February 23rd. He had surgery on his left hand the previous Friday to repair a condition that had developed--not from any specific injury. He expected to be using the sling for several more days, will then advance to a smaller support, and will need to do some physical therapy when the repair to several bones is healed. He is right-handed so that is making his recuperation a bit easier.

Elizabeth Freese and **Talley Summerlin** report that their third winter in **New Jersey** is their first tough one. They've been shoveling and trudging their way through record low temperatures and record high snowfalls...with no end in sight through February! As of mid-February, they had over a foot of snow and ice on the ground for more than a week, with another foot forecast in a few days. Even the locals are begging for March to hurry up and get here. They moved off the **Drew University** campus in June and promptly got a **Cockapoo** puppy from a **Mennonite** farming family in **Pennsylvania**. Her name is **Olive** and she loves the snow, so she could not be happier. **Vivian** has started playing basketball in the township's league and it turns out she is a natural. They see many hours watching basketball in their future. **Rose** was recently named "**Student of the Month**" for **Madison Junior School**, where she is enjoying 6th grade. Both girls recently performed in a township wide choir concert and were thrilled to sing alongside some seasoned high school seniors. Having completed her coursework in the fall, Elizabeth is a teaching assistant in the **Drew** theology program this spring semester and preparing for her comprehensive exams. Talley has almost finished his second year doing public relations in New York City. He gets to work on **GoGo SqueeZ** natural applesauce in a pouch, **Philips LED** lighting products, and the **Best Friends Animal Society**. The commute is a grind but the work is positive, compelling stuff. **Talley** says, "We miss Austin and we miss y'all!"

Pat and Mel Oakes enjoyed a wonderful five-day visit in early February from their daughter **Beth**. Coming from **Iowa City**, she was quite amused at the uproar in Austin over predicted snow and ice (none materialized). She enjoyed the warm weather here (30s and 40s) and commiserated with **Eugene, Emily, and Ethan** back home (-5-15 degrees). While in Austin Beth taught two orchestra classes at her alma mater **Austin High School** and did a master class with four talented young musicians at the **UT String Project** where Beth was a student a number of years ago. She also did a one hour presentation to parents about how her life as a musician developed. **Pat and Mel** enjoyed sitting in on both of those presentations.

In late January, **Liz Nash** and **Beth Gleason** were part of a nine-member team who went to **El Salvador** on a mission trip. While there, they learned that the community of **San Juan**, high above **Alegria**, is in severe trouble. The 60 families there depend on picking coffee (they live in a coffee plantation this time of year for their meager income.) The coffee crop has been damaged by a volcanic eruption nearby. There is very little work, and the families are without much food. Our trustees have approved raising money to help through our church, and our partner in Alegria, Oscar Rodriguez, has identified how to get food and the quantity needed for these families. If you would like to donate, you can write a check payable to Congregational Church of Austin and write "El Salvador" in the memo line.



Beth Gleason distributing free dental supplies (donated by the Austin children's dental practice, "Smiles of Austin" on 38th St) at the San Juan school in the mountains of El Salvador.



Beth Gleason with the school children in El Salvador.

Hill Country Ride for Aids

It's that time of year again—**Hill Country Ride for AIDS** preparation. "Preparation" means **George Hetrick, Robin Chapman, and Tom VandeStadt** are enduring strong shifting winds and wildly mercurial temperatures as they log miles on their bikes in order to complete the challenging **HCRA** course in **April**. "Preparation" also means fundraising. The HCRA is a fundraiser for a number of organizations in central Texas that provide support to people living with **AIDS**.

The **Care Communities of Austin** is one of those organizations. Our church now has two Care Communities "Care Teams," and George, Robin, and Tom will once again be riding on the Care Communities Cycling Team. If you'd like to support the fundraising efforts of George, Robin, or Tom, please go to **hillcountryride.org** and click the link for supporting a participant. Type in the name of the person you'd like to support and follow the instructions. If you prefer, you can write a check to Hill Country Ride for AIDS with the name of the participant you're supporting in the memo and give the check to Tom at church. He'll take care of the rest. George, Robin, and Tom thank you for the many years you've supported them in this effort, and for your continued support this year.



Bill Phillips performing the wedding ceremony of Linda and Paul Shoecraft in Wimberley on January 18, 2014. Linda was one of Betty's students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1970. She also served as a sitter for Bill and Betty's daughters, Katy and Stephanie. The wedding was held inside the cedar pyramid (a 50 foot building constructed, in and out, with cedar.)

Austin CROP Hunger Walk 2014

March 23rd Sunday
1:45 Registration 2:30 Step Off
Camp Mabry
2200 West 35th Street

Information packets are available with all the materials your organization needs to participate in the CROP Hunger Walk. Packets may be picked up from these locations. Please call or email to arrange a pick up time.

United Christian Church
3500 W. Parmer Ln
(512)218-8110 – diane@uccaustin.org

i-ACT
2921 E. 17th St., #3
(512)386-9145, ext 308 – dwilliams@interfaithtexas.org

CWS/CROP Office
6633 Highway E 290, Suite 108
(512)451-2062 – tx@cwsglobal.org

Capital Area Food Bank
8201 S. Congress

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

Return Service Requested

Deadline for April Visitor — March 21st

History Corner



Here is a photo of the church (right) and the parsonage (left) about 1939-40. The church was built in the early 1920s and was dedicated in 1925. You can see that there are buildings where there is now a parking lot between the church and the Castilian dormitory which was built in the mid-1960s. The parsonage was demolished in the mid-1960s and ground was broken for the education wing (now called the Towery Wing) in 1968.