

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Spring is here! Early this year but here. The tree of life is blooming, Earth is flowering, and it brings to mind one of my favorite stories about our place on Earth.

Before there was a world there stood a solitary deified tree. As the world's creation approached the tree became pregnant with life. From its many branches sprouted one of everything, not only physical objects like maize and deer but things like lightning and time. The tree produced so many things that its abundance became impossible to support and hold. The fruit fell from its branches and one of everything smashed open and

scattered seeds all around the tree. Soon there were countless young seedlings surrounding the foot of the tree and the tree provided shelter for the plants as they grew, nurturing them until the new plants finally crowded out the tree. Since then the tree has existed as a living stump at the center of the world.



Tzutuhil Mayans from Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala symbolized this myth called Flowering Mountain Earth as a mountain with a maize sprout on top and they placed this image in their community's Catholic Church. Traditional Tzutuhils believe that as long as they feed and care for the stump it will continue regenerating life. They ritually care for the stump and feed it by placing offerings into a hole in the ground they call *rmuxux*, which means umbilicus.

This "tree of life" myth is not simply a story that people tell to account for the beginning of the world in the remote past. It conveys the story people are living in the present day, the story of their reciprocal relationship

with flowering Earth. People are one of everything and they owe their existence to the source of everything. Life's source is alive, and like life itself, it requires constant care. Just as the source of life protects and nurtures life so must people protect and nurture the source of their life. Their very existence depends on it.

The immediate source of our existence is Earth. Whether you believe God created the cosmos and Earth, prefer a scientific explanation for our origin or relish the mystery of our being here, the fact remains that planet Earth is the immediate source of our existence. We are literally Earth's fruit. Earth is alive, and like all that lives, Earth requires care. Our care. Earth requires protection and nurture. Ours. Our relationship with Earth is reciprocal and our very existence depends on our continuing care for Earth. If we stop caring, if we stop protecting and nurturing our source, our story will not turn out well.

Tom

History Corner

by Pat and Mel Oakes

During the budget discussion at the Annual Meeting on Jan. 29th, there was some discussion about reinstating our annual contribution to Huston-Tillotson University. We had cut it last year due to budget constraints. It became clear during the discussion that many of our newer members did not know about our historical ties to Huston-Tillotson. Two colleges were established in Austin for black students after the Civil War. Samuel Huston College, founded in 1875 and chartered in 1910, came out of the Methodist Church. Tillotson College, founded in 1877 with classes beginning in 1881, came out of the American Missionary Society of the Congregational Church (now UCC). They merged in 1952 and became Huston-Tillotson College. In 2005, it became Huston-Tillotson Univer-

sity. Huston-Tillotson University is Austin's oldest institution of higher education.

It is a private historically black liberal arts school located at 900 Chicon St, Austin, Texas 78702, and it has an enrollment of about 900 students. Nancy Brown's late husband Dr. James Wiley Brown was on the faculty, as was Dr. James Perkins, another church member. Our pastor John Towery, who served our church from 1959-1989, was awarded an honorary degree by Huston-Tillotson College in 1985. Several of our members have served on the board of HTU including Nodie Murphy, Don Brown (who was also chair of the board), Frances Alford, and Rambi Briggs. Joe McMillan was President of Huston-Tillotson from 1988-2000.



Personals

by Pat Oakes

On Sunday, Feb.19, we welcomed four new members plus one three-year-old. Deacon Debby Kohrt introduced Liz and Zach Hawver with their son Atlas who is 3 years old. Liz and Zach are both from Topeka, Kansas. They traveled and moved to various places to enjoy life and for their education. Liz graduated with a Bachelor of Science Nursing degree from Baker College in Topeka. Zach graduated from Texas State University in San Marcus, Texas, with a degree in history. They married in 2007, and are looking forward to celebrating their 10th anniversary. They moved to Austin in 2011. Zach just started a new job with Texas Home Health Hospice as Coordinator Resource Liaison. Liz also just started a new job at Community Care Women's Health Clinic as a high risk OB nurse.



2/19/17 New members Zach, Atlas, and Liz Hawver with sisters Whitney and Mallory Beyers

Deacon Betty Bodman introduced sisters Whitney and Mallory Beyers, who are from Fort Myers, Florida, and attended a UCC church on Sanibel Island. Both of them were attracted to the church because of our work with the homeless. Whitney's training is in historical preservation. She came to Austin 3 1/2 years ago without a job secured, but was able to find employment with the Texas Historical Commission. She is currently waiting to hear from two graduate programs in historical preservation (UT and Columbia). She is specifically interested in doing more work with materials—the actual stuff old buildings are made of. Whitney lives with her boyfriend Aaron, who is a fine furniture builder and also does restoration of antiques. So their interests dove-tail (her pun). Mallory trained in music business and came to Austin about 4 years ago. She is looking for work in the non-profit sector but currently works in a downtown restaurant. If anyone knows of non-profit work—even volunteer opportunities—they could let her know. Eventually she would like to found her own non-profit; her dream would be to have a music studio where the homeless could come to record their music.

Congratulations to Stephen Russell who has been named a Fellow by The National Council on Family

Relations (NCFR). Stephen is the Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor in Child Development and is Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at UT Austin. Fellows are nominated by their peers who take into consideration achievements in scholarship, teaching, outreach, practice, and professional service to the NCFR. Stephen is one of three Fellows named for 2016. Stephen's areas of expertise include youth development, LGBT families, school curriculum and climate, *(cont. on p. 5)*



1/28/17 Rollin Russell on his 80th birthday; with Emma Finch (his granddaughter and daughter of Amy Russell) and son Stephen Russell--Rollin's daughter Amy gave him the shirt!

April Visitor Deadline—March 20, 2017

Heart of Texas Association News

February

by Liz Nash

On February 15th and 16th, ministers from our Conference met at Slumber Falls for our annual clergy retreat, led by Designated Conference Minister Don Longbottom. It was the largest clergy gathering in a long time—we had about 60 clergy there, including many from the Heart of Texas Association. Our time included quiet meditation and group sharing about scripture passages, worship, and focused discussion about how our churches, Associations, and Conference can live more vibrant and faithful in our lives together. Led by Don Longbottom, we focused on the importance of building the spiritual lives and discipleship of our leaders and congregations, of each church finding its particular mission and calling in the service of others and in the work for justice, and of the work together of starting and supporting new UCC churches. We talked about the life-giving importance for our way of following Christ of practices like going on the Walk to Emmaus, the Journey, and other intentional faith enriching experiences, and we talked about new ways of being the church. Our time together was creative and inspiring. I hope that much of the grace and inspiration of this gathering will flow to all of our churches as we seek who God calls us to be and become.

As we have churches beginning and growing in this Association, we know we also have churches that come to the end of their lives together. On Sunday, February 26th, St. Paul United Church in Lockhart will hold its final worship service. St. Paul began its ministry in 1913, took its current name of St. Paul United Church of Christ at the time of the merger that formed the UCC (changing its name from Christ Evangelical and Reformed Church), and built its current 12-sided building in 1964. Pastor Carlson Jakubik has served St. Paul's faithfully since 2010, after serving Umlandand leading worship in several churches in the former South Texas and Brazos Asso-

ciations. Don Longbottom will preach at the closing St. Paul worship. Our prayers go with the people of St. Paul and with Carlson in this time of closure. We give thanks for their ministry and for Carlson's. Carlson lives and is active in study and worship at Eden-Hill Communities in New Braunfels, and would love to find preaching opportunities in driving distance of his home.

Finally, here is a reminder that our spring Heart of Texas Association meeting is coming up on Sunday, April 23rd, at Faith UCC in New Braunfels. Registration is at 3:00 pm and the meeting is from 3:30 through dinner. Plans are in the works for the agenda, worship, and program, and will be shared soon. Come to be part of the life of our churches together, for good fellowship, and for worship. We hope you will plan to join us!

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Don Brown
Deacons Chair	Betty Bodman
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Christian Education	Rachel Dietz, Lynne Lemley
Youth Sunday School	
Coordinator	John Burlinson
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes

Personals (continued)

by Pat Oakes

and family policy. He is also a strong advocate for social issues and inclusivity. In addition to being a distinguished Fellow, Stephen is also a good son who went home to North Carolina for his dad Rollin's 80th birthday. Rollin Russell celebrated his 80th birthday in January. Family and friends gathered at his and Betsy's home in Hillsborough, NC, to celebrate with their "bad ass dad". He and Betsy and their kids (Bethany, Stephen, and Amy) were members of the church between 1974 and 1982. Rollin was the Associate Minister of the South Central Conference at that time.

Chris Searles and his non-profit Biodiversity group are featuring a photo of Barbara Burnham and her two adorable granddaughters in the Biointegrity 2017 Sweetheart Card campaign. This came about when he thanked Barbara for one of her donations in honor of her granddaughters, Rebecca and Samantha Rosson. Barbara told him about Samantha's intense interest in and knowledge of endangered species, and he was taken with the idea and asked for a photo of them to use in the campaign. Barbara and the kids were honored to have been included! They hope this will inspire others to donate. Unfortunately, the link to the photo is currently not available.

Nancy Brown celebrated her 97th birthday on Thursday, Feb. 16. She goes to exercise class 5 mornings a week in her wheelchair with her loving caregiver Isabel, has wonderful care at the Campbell Nursing Center at Buckner Villas, and is visited often by her many good friends--especially her friends from her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta. If you would like to give her a call or go by to see her, here is her information. Campbell Skilled Nursing Center, Rm 511, Buckner Villas, 11110 Tom Adams Drive, Austin Texas 78753, phone number is 512) 233-7961.

Joan Mueller reports that Larry Conover from Church World Service contacted her and Bill. He was touring the country visiting with donors. They have supported Church World Service with regular donations and were selected along with others to have Larry come by. They had little notice but invited Cathy Hubbs, their neighbor at Westminster, and Reverend Liz Nash to join them for an afternoon visit. Mr. Conover said he came to get acquainted and he asked about their lives. They, in turn, quizzed him about the



2/16/17 Beautiful Nancy Brown on her 97th birthday

areas where Church World Service has missions and what kinds of projects they undertake. As they listened, it became apparent to them that CWS is a very reputable group. They don't make quick stops in emergency situations. They stay and develop local leaders and they remain committed to a project long after the immediate emergency has calmed down. They also partner with other groups who can better serve in various ways. Larry said years ago when he first went out in the field, he became acquainted with two widowed women who were caring for a total of 28 children. Their needs were obvious. He still keeps in touch with those women. His other stories covered many countries. The Muellers feel they were lucky he called them and wanted to share their impressions with our church family. They hope we can sense how pleased they were as they listened to the missions they take on. Bill and Joan will definitely continue to support CWS missions. They convinced Larry to stay for dinner and enjoyed being with him.

Sunday coffee hour continues to be a chance to visit with each other, but it is also now a chance to communicate with our public officials. People are encouraged to write a postcard or more to our senators, representatives, and the governor or president. The table, complete with cards, stamps, pens, ideas and addresses will be up for the foreseeable future.



Writing to our representatives are constituents Alden and his mom Warinda Harris, Amy Rivera, Liz Nash, Ruth Koenig, and

Folks at the church no longer just look forward to the Super Bowl just for the football game—they look forward to the Super Bowl Sunday Salsa Sale, a yearly youth group effort to raise money for the annual mission trip. The group spent Saturday night, Feb. 4, at University Baptist and made salsa with the group from our church, University Christian, and University Baptist. They made several kinds of salsa, including a version of peach salsa pronounced "not disgusting" by those who sampled it (the favor scale depends on individual taste buds). Reuel and our youth brought over 24 jars to sell during coffee hour, the most by far of our salsa sales, and made a little under \$200 (after paying our share of the costs). This summer, 5 youth and one adult will head to Washington, D.C. with our large, Austin and College Station area youth trip directed by Reach Beyond Mission, the organization founded and directed by Mary Lu Johnston. Reach Beyond Mission grew out of our mission trip experiences of many years, combining work with social service organizations, speakers and learning opportunities to understand related justice and poverty issues, and worship and faith study to connect all of this with our faith. Salsa makers and/or sellers included Megan Goff, Savanna and Harrison Tucker - and a friend of Savanna's, Alden Harris, Tess Howicz, Reuel Nash. Not all were there overnight but all were part of it.

Aaron (our great pianist who was here just before Jonathan came) and Quintina Carter-Enyi are expecting their first child on March 21st. They are now living in Atlanta where Aaron is teaching. There will be more information in next month's Visitor.

Yoshi Kaneda, our pastor from 1989-2001, reports from San Diego, CA, that five church members (Yoshi and Setsuko plus 3 others) from their church Pioneer Ocean View, UCC visited Heian Church, their sister church, in Kyoto, Japan, last November. They extended their heartfelt welcome to them and the travelers were all overwhelmed. A typical Japanese "omotenashi" . . . that is. They made new friends of Christian faith across the Pacific Ocean. Yoshi asks: "Why this hustle? Today's mission is a two way street. Receiving is as important as giving. Learning is as necessary as teaching. By engaging ourselves in a two way street both our partners and we are nurtured and enriched. We have been good in giving and teaching for so long. Today it's about time for us to receive and learn from our partners. Yes, in this spirit we, the five visitors, have received much and learned a lot from the members of Heian Church. We are getting excited about their visit to us sometime this year." Setsuko and Yoshi stayed in Kyoto just for one week. The other three went on, visiting Hiroshima, Nara, Osaka, and Tokyo, etc. In other Kaneda news, Setsuko and Yoshi were delighted that their youngest grandchild, Justine, was also admitted to Stanford University last December. Two of their granddaughters will be attending Stanford in the fall of this year, so Yoshi is thinking of starting to cheer for their football team, switching from being a long time fan of "The Long Horn." Time changes fast!

Poor Mary Sinclair spent the month of February in Palm Springs again—someone has to do it! The dry desert air suits her so well and she doesn't really feel the joint pain from her rheumatoid arthritis—at least not quite as much as in cold and snowy Ontario. She played tennis almost every day and connected with the tennis pro who gave her lessons last year. Richard was not inclined to visit the States in the current political climate so he stayed at home with the hounds. Mary could not get out of her rental, so came to Palm Springs anyway. Richard has officially retired as of Dec 31, 2016, except for his PhD students, and his book, and the project which will have him in central British Columbia for several weeks in March . . . Mary notes, "It ain't gonna happen, is it?" They both wish that they were able to spend more time with us in Texas—without actually being in Texas!!

⁶ Long-time members of the church will remember Margaret Rigney, who died on January 27th, 2017, at

the age of 93. She and her late husband Carl (d. 2011) worshipped with us during the 1990s while Yoshi Kaneda was our pastor. During World War II, she served in the U.S. Cadet Nursing Corps. She was involved in various aspects of nursing for much of her life. In 1993, they moved to the Zilker neighborhood in South Austin and then later to Westminster Manor in central Austin.

Pat Oakes continues to make slow but sure progress in walking again. She has started a new physical therapy program in the hopes that she will soon be able to walk more steadily and less like Frankenstein. With Mel's encouragement, several weeks ago Pat gave driving a try after a fifteen-month hiatus. The two ventured to nearby Burger Center and its very large parking lot for a short driving lesson. Pat did just fine with Mel's instructions on when to stop quickly, etc., (never going above 20 mph to begin) but she is not ready for the big time yet. They both got a laugh out of watching the teenagers practice at the same time. Mel taught their girls at that same lot lo these many years ago. Next up is driving in the neighborhood.

The Accidental Tourist of the Soul with Ginny Agnew

In 1985 Anne Tyler's Book about an armchair traveler won the National Book Critics Circle award for fiction. Three years later Macon Leary—that armchair traveler—was immortalized by William Hurt's performance in the movie. Ever since that time Ginny Agnew has struggled to perfect the art of armchair traveler of the soul. Through literature, poetry, philosophy and spiritual writings she has traversed this world and is ready now to report back on her travels.

March 15 (W) 12 noon-1 pm

\$35 (Includes lunch, pre-registration required)

Seton Cove 3708 Crawford Street Austin, TX 78731



IAct Passport Program March 11, 2017:

Our fourth Passport destination will be **Congregation Agudas Achim**. You are invited to attend this Jewish service as a part of the Passport Program on Saturday, March 11, 2017. If you'd like to attend, be sure to [RSVP](#).

This gathering will be in celebration of the Jewish holiday [Purim](#), a time of celebration in the sanctuary and readings from the book of Ester.

[Join the iACT Passport Program](#)
[as we travel to our fourth destination on](#)
[Saturday, March 11!](#)

Time: Please arrive at 7:00pm

Location: Congregation Agudas Achim ([7300 Hart Ln., Austin, TX 78731](#))

Attire: Come in costume. You can dress as any character from the book of Ester, or you can dress to the theme of The Walking Dead.

Parking: Ample parking is available on site.

About Congregation Agudas Achim

Congregation Agudas Achim is a group of people who come together in Austin, Texas, to connect with one another, feed their Jewish souls and connect with God. Living in a dynamic, fast-growing city, they come from many places and bring their many talents and traditions. They cherish a connection with authentic tradition, prayer, and Jewish practice that is best represented by the Conservative Movement. They welcome newcomers; they honor their roots. They have grown by 100 families in the past two years and now number more than 613. They are led by Rabbi Neil F. Blumofe, Spiritual Leader, who has been part of their family for 13 years.

Talent Show

by Pat and Mel Oakes

Friday evening, Feb. 24th, was a delightful evening at the church. Once again, the fearless and fabulous Nodie Murphy (aka the arm twister and soup chef) organized the talent show, complete with a soup supper and a show with more than 20 acts with donations going to Huston-Tillotson University (HTU). Jonathan Geer was the accompanist, Jaime Hadley was the electronics expert, clam chowder chef, and prize maker, with the Deacons as nutrition facilitators. Also noteworthy was that the paper cups used for the soup and beverages were in the colors of HTU gold and maroon. After supper, The Do-It-Yourself Choir (Cathy Hubbs, Norma Hawes, Lucy Hanouille, Greg Futch, Dennis Murphy, Sara Ross, Katie Lemley, Barbara Burnham, soloist Amy Harris with Nodie directing) started things off with a lively rendition of *He Never Failed Me Yet*. When they finished, Nodie reminded us all that this was a favorite song of the late Melanie Wilkinson, our beloved soloist and friend, who died so young and so tragically on Feb. 23, 2009. Nodie chose that number to celebrate Melanie's life, the choir having not sung it since her death.

days in Panama; Pat Oakes demonstrated her skill at using dressing tools to put on her socks and shoes; and Nancy Edison shared how gardening creates a wonderful world view for children. Jonathan Geer and Roberto Hernandez played and sang a guitar duo (both are learning to play the guitar); Beth Placek explained why she loves to read by reading a selection from *The Lord of the Rings* and dancing to some



2/24/17 Ruth Koenig telling a funny joke at the talent show .

music from the film; Alison Goodgame with Pam, Savanna, and Harrison Tucker sang several songs while playing their own percussion instruments; Dave Ross recited Emma Lazarus's best known sonnet, *The New Colossus*; and Ruth Koenig did a great job of telling a very funny joke!



2/24/17 Dave Ross reading Emma Lazarus' sonnet, "The New Colossus" at the talent show.

Jamie Hadley gave a brief presentation on paper foundation quilting and announced that a quilt square would be a prize given at the end of the show to one of the performers. At that point Katie Lemley took over as Ms of Ceremonies with Savanna Tucker acting as timekeeper. Mel Oakes gave a physics demonstration involving two pendulums; Greg Futch read a poem; Bill Phillips told a story of his early and later



2/24/17 Zoey Parkhill and her dad Jason ready for her to dance at the talent show.

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Zoey Parkhill, after some hesitation and with her dad Jason's loving encouragement, performed a lively dance. Her brother Caleb was supposed to dance with her, but he had sprained his ankle just hours before while playing after school. Jen Howicz read an excerpt from *The Velveteen Rabbit* in honor of her daughters who loved to have her read it to them.



2/24/17 Juliet Quisenberry belting out a song at the church talent show

The talented Quisenberrys each performed in turn—Juliet sang a song, Scarlett did gymnastics down the central aisle, and mom Shannon sang a beautiful ballad from *Miss Saigon*.



2/24/17 Scarlett Quisenberry showing her gymnastics prowess.



2/24/17 Chencho Flores and Beth Placek just before Chencho played his accordion.



2/24/17 Joy Penticuff reciting a poem.

was outstanding singing an early Elvis song and Joy Penticuff moved everyone with her recitation of a 1925 poem by James Weldon Johnson, *Go Down Death*. Sara Ross on viola, Amy Harris on violin and Jonathan Geer on piano brought the house down with a lively number followed by Harrison Tucker reciting a free verse poem he wrote. Barbara Burnham read a short children's story she wrote followed by the well-known, dynamic Chencho Flores playing on his accordion. It was then time for the Do-It-Yourself Choir to teach the audience a new song, *Thirteen Nouns*, about words in English which end in -f or -fe: lots of fun for everyone. Sara Ross's name was drawn from the bowl where all of the performers had placed their names. Sara was delighted with her prize! Marvelously, the event raised \$600.50 for HTU!

Jim Howicz shared his secrets to making perfect banana bread, and Betty Bodman talked about her reasons for knitting—and showed hats/caps she made with several of the children modeling them. Bill Beardall with his guitar was outstanding singing an early Elvis song and Joy Penticuff moved everyone with her recitation of a 1925 poem.