

# THE VISITOR

**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: congregationalchurchofaustin@gmail.com Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



A few weeks ago, I participated in an interfaith dialogue on faith, the environment, and climate change with Mustafa Koroglu and Yaira Robinson. My task

was to speak from a Christian perspective. The more I researched the topic, the more I realized there is no single Christian perspective, but multiple perspectives from which Christians can speak. In my presentation, I identified three broad approaches from which Christians are currently addressing environmental concerns and climate change: **Creation Care**, **Eco-Justice**, and **Eco-Spirituality**.

The **Creation Care** approach is what we typically think of as the classic stewardship narrative: God created humans in God's image to care for God's creation. It appeals particularly to Christian evangelicals because it's based predominantly on Biblical texts, though mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians draw from it as well.

This approach often highlights one or the other of the Genesis creation stories wherein God pronounces creation good, creates the human in God's image, and gives the human dominion over creation, or creates the human from the earth, and calls upon the human to till and keep the garden. When using the dominion story, it defines dominion as responsible care, and critiques the human domination of creation as a faulty interpretation of dominion. This approach also cites passages from the Psalms, the creation drama in Job, and passages from the Wisdom literature. It identifies Jesus Christ as the model of loving and responsible dominion, and quotes passages that proclaim all creation reconciled through Christ.

The **Eco-Justice** approach makes an explicit connection between political, economic, social, racial, gender, and sexual-orientation justice on the one hand, and ecological justice on the other. It's used by a number of mainline Protestant churches and Roman Catholics, and to lesser extent by evangelicals. Those who use this approach draw not only from the Bible, but from a variety of disciplines such as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies.

The Biblical texts that inform this approach describe the liberating acts of God in Exodus, the Sabbath Jubilee mandates in Leviticus, the critiques of injustice, oppression, and exploitation in the prophetic books, and the passages that illustrate Jesus Christ's solidarity with the poor. Christian liberation theology, and Christian feminist and womanist theologies, also inform this approach. Influenced by liberation theology, the Eco-Justice approach draws connections between humans dominating other humans and humans dominating the earth, and it calls attention to the fact that the poor suffer first and the most from ecological degradation and climate change. Inspired by feminist theology, the Eco-Justice approach draws connections between men dominating women and men dominating the earth. Womanist theology adds race and class to the critique of gender domination, thus enabling the Eco-Justice approach to draw attention to how ecological degradation and climate change impact poor women of color.

The **Eco-Spirituality** approach is a highly eclectic one because it draws from so many sources—the Bible, the physical sciences, the social sciences, and various contemplative and mystical traditions. In it, I find two distinct aspects. One aspect is analytical, conceptual, and theological. It deals with theological thinking and discourse. The other aspect is experiential. It deals with spiritual practice and what's traditionally called mystical experience.

On the conceptual theological side, there's a strong interest in developing a new theology of creation that draws on contemporary scientific thinking on cosmology and evolution, what Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme call "the common creation story." These theologies deal conceptually with cosmic, biological, and cultural evolution; bio-diversity, interdependence, and mutuality; the relationship between God and creation; and what it means to be human on earth.

The experiential side seeks to go beyond concepts to spiritual or soulful experiences of one's relationship to the cosmos, the earth, and God. It includes spiritual practices that dissolve the ego boundaries that create the sense of a separate self, and rituals that open one to more profound experiences of awe and wonder, appreciation and gratitude, and the unfolding creation as sacred time and place. Roman Catholic John Hart writes about cultivating "sacramental consciousness" and Protestant Larry Rasmussen writes about "web-of-life sacramentality." In both cases, people experience the cosmos, the earth, and the web-of-life as a sacrament of God's presence and activity, and sacramental acts are those that heal and harmonize one's relationships within

the web-of-life. Perhaps the most succinct statement of this experiential approach is Christian mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg's: "My spiritual awakening was when I saw God in all things and all things in God."

The depth and breadth of the Christian tradition—Biblical, theological, spiritual—offers a rich array of resources that Christians can use to reflect upon and respond to environmental issues and climate change. If you'd like to explore any or all of these approaches further, please see me. I'd love to study them further with you.

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### **Discovering God's Economy Workshop May 19**

Congregations can create new economies. What if congregations made micro-loans to people in their communities? Imagine bringing the world of money and the life of the church together to make a difference in the ways our economic system functions - for the healing of the world. Dr. Joy Anderson, a prominent national leader at the intersection of business and social change, will lead a workshop on **May 19, 2015**.

**Time:** 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Registration will begin at 9:00 am

**Location:** Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, McCord Community Center, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, 78705

**Cost:** \$60 (Lunch included)

### **Chorus Austin Presents Southwest Voices Concert May 16 and 17**

Back by popular demand! This concert features music from Texas and Southwest composers and the winning work from Chorus Austin's Young Composers Competition.

**Dates and Locations:**

**Saturday, May 16** from 8:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 8134 Mesa Drive, Austin, TX 78759

**Sunday, May 17** from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 3501 Red River Street, Austin, TX 78705

**Cost:** Tickets are \$20 each, \$15 for students.

Purchase tickets from [chorusaustin.org](http://chorusaustin.org)

## Personals

by Pat Oakes

**Kathy Whatley**, our wonderful **office manager** for the past 4 years, has decided to retire. Her husband retired some time ago and they are looking forward to more time together to travel and just enjoy life. There was a celebration for Kathy at coffee hour on **Palm Sunday** during which praises were sung and said and fellowship was enjoyed by all. Unfortunately, the office manager hired to take Kathy's place had to quit after only a week because of a serious family emergency in California. Our new office manager, **Rimma Aguirre** started on Monday, May 4th, with Kathy stepping in to train her for the first week. Thank you, Kathy!!



We honored our retiring office Manager Kathy Whatley on Palm Sunday at coffee hour

Also on Palm Sunday, it was a joy to see **Debbie Appel Knowlton** with her husband **Bob**, daughter **Emily**, son **Samuel**, and her dad **Vic**. We all missed seeing **Betty** who has joined the choir of a Methodist church near where Betty and Vic live on **Bee Cave Road**. They had a wonderful visit and were looking forward to a family gathering that afternoon.

**Don Miles'** daughter **Juliette** is mother-of-the-groom for two weddings this year. Her youngest—**Garrett Ritzman**—married his wife, **Tiffanie**, on Valentine's Day, and her oldest, **Austin**, is set to marry his fiancée, **Abby**, on August 15th. The two young men are lieutenants in the army now. Juliette retired as a major in the **Air Force**, but is still flying helicopters with the **Army Reserve**. She couldn't bring her "major" rank with her to the reserve, so now she has to salute both of her sons. **Be sure and wish Don happy birthday on the 16th of May.**



The Knowlton/Appel family (left to right): Bob, Emily, Debbie, Vic, and Samuel

**Greg and Margaret Futch's** son **Matthew**, and daughter-in-law **Cyndi**, are slowly adapting to the challenges of Waltham, MA, and of his new job at a major utility in the Northeast. There have many trying moments as they get used to their new world, but so far, so good. Greg feels their guardian angel is looking after the whole clan!!!



Greg and Margaret Futch's darling grandchildren-- Alex and Riley

**Don and Sharon Brown** are celebrating the birth of their first grandchild. **Elizabeth Hadley Brown** was born March 26 at 7:08 a.m., healthy and precious. This photo was taken just minutes after her birth and captured the joy her parents **Andy** and **Sara** were feeling. Don and Sharon are over the moon and treasuring every visit with her.



**Andy Brown with his wife Sara and their brand-new daughter Elizabeth Hadley Brown**

Former church pianist and long-time member **Florence Castle's** 99th birthday is on Wednesday, May 13. While she is no longer able to come to church, she certainly would appreciate a birthday card or two! Her address is 2901 Del Curto Road, Austin, TX 78704.

It was good to see **Dan Jeffrey** at church on Sunday, March 29th. He was visiting from his home in Hermiston, Oregon. Dan was delighted to see a number of familiar faces and folks were delighted to see him.



**George Hetrick with Dan Jeffrey who was back for a visit. Dan lives in Hermiston, Oregon, now.**



**Giovanni Fracasso as Bill Sykes with his dog Lucy a.k.a. Bull's Eye**

April was National Poetry Month. **Giovanni Fracasso** (grandson of **Fran**—also a poet—and **Rambie Briggs**) had 2 poems chosen to be read on KUT's student poetry project. One aired on Saturday, April 11, another later in April, and they will eventually be posted online (<http://kut.org/topic/student-poetry-project>). Giovanni (Gio) is an 8th grader at Rawson-Saunders School. The Briggs and Fracasso families are very proud. Fran and Rambie hosted the Briggs' cousins and children on Saturday, April 11. Thirty gathered for eating and visiting, but the highlight may have been picture-taking in the bluebonnets which are all along the lakeshore where there used to be water!

**Beth Placek** enjoys her visits to D.C. The high point of her most recent trip, the first weekend of April, was meeting a very friendly dog who works for the U.S. Capitol police. The dog is an Afghanistan veteran named Gus. Beth didn't ask about his former man, but he is with a fine man now and forever. It was very moving to get hugs and kisses from a dog who came back from the war!!!

## Heart of Texas Association News

May

by Liz Nash

Our Association is moving forward on the “nuts and bolts” of combining the former South Texas and Brazos Associations. On Saturday, April 10, the new Committee on Ministry (formerly Church and Ministry) and the Executive Board met (in separate meetings) at St. Peter’s Church of Coupland.

Our Committee on Ministry is expanded right now, as it includes most of the members from the two former Associations with Anne Wehrly and Charles Stark serving as co-chairs for the transitions period. Both are experienced doing this work and their willingness to continue for the year is a real gift. Rev. Martin Garrison, pastor of St. Peter’s, attended as a possible nominee to replace one of our outgoing clergy representatives.

Our Executive Board continued working on organizational issues. We are grateful that Charlotte Albert has agreed to be the Association secretary, and appointed her to this role until she can be elected at the fall meeting. This board was charged by an Association vote at the spring meeting with taking the actions needed to run the Association while formulating a new constitution and by-laws. We have had different types of representation in the two Associations in the past, with Brazos having a board representative from each church and with South Texas having board representatives that were at-large and elected by the Association. Since the distances and number of churches have increased with the merger, we are strongly considering going to a model more like that of South Texas, with several at-large board representatives elected and officers from across the Association, with a requirement that these be from different churches to keep the governance from being too concentrated with the members of a few churches. Moderator John Boydston has written a first draft of a constitution and by-laws based on a combination of those of the former associations, and we are currently forming a committee to revise and finalize those. John has circulated the draft and would be very happy to send it to anyone interested for comments and suggestions. Contact him at [jrbnews@gmail.com](mailto:jrbnews@gmail.com) if you want a copy and wish to read/offer suggestions.

Our friends at Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin are continuing their process of considering dual affiliation with our Association with a possible early summer vote. We look forward with joy to welcoming them if they decide to join us.

This month, Pastor Judy Sherman is retiring from her position as Associate Minister at St. John’s UCC, Burton. Judy has served churches in South Texas and Brazos, played a major role in establishing the Burton Bridge Ministry, and has served both of the Associations and the Conference in a number of ways. We give thanks for all of her ministry and wish her great blessings on her life as she moves to be with family. And we look forward to welcoming Pastor Risa Garza as the new Associate at St. John’s.

Finally, our congratulations to Church of the Savior, celebrating a 30th anniversary this April with a drive to raise \$20,000 to build a “tiny house” at the Mobile Loaves and Fishes Community First Village in the Austin area. What a great way to celebrate God’s love!

Blessings in Christ,  
Liz Nash  
Association Minister



**Cameron Goff (2nd from the left) and his Anderson Trojan teammates after winning the 4 X 400 relay**

**Cameron Goff**, a senior at Anderson High School, has been busy with high school track. Here he is at the District Meet with his Anderson Trojans teammates after winning the 4x400 m relay. In other news, Cameron has decided to attend UT Austin in the fall, majoring in Chemistry, and living in an off-campus dorm.

As a relative newcomer to Texas, **Ruth Koenig** is still learning that the blue flowers that bloom here in the spring are bluebonnets—not bluebells—and helping her learn are her twin great-granddaughters **Dorothea** and **Charlotte** who posed prettily for everyone.



**Ruth Koenig's great-granddaughters Thea (Dorothea) and Lottie (Charlotte) enjoying the bluebonnets**

**Bill Mueller** retired from singing in the choir on Sunday, April 19th. Bill decided on his own that it was time to retire. Bill has sung with our choir for about the last 5 years, but when he and **Joan** were living in California, he sang in a several church choirs sand community choruses over the years **Nodie** was very sorry to see him go, as was the rest of the choir, but she has designated Bill as an undercover agent in the congregation. He is to be looking and listening for new recruits for the choir. Happy hunting, Bill!



**Joan and Bill Mueller on Bill's retirement Sunday from the choir; Jason Parkhill in the background**

**Janet Parsons** spent a few days in early April in the Ozark National Forest, and the dogwood and redbud trees were just starting to bloom. It was truly gorgeous!

**David Pinkard** and his wife **Suzanne**, and daughter **Daphne** arrived on April 17th for a short visit with **Doyal** and **Tommie**. They all had a wonderful time enjoying the lovely spring weather—and Doyal and Tommie are enchanted by their adorable granddaughter.

**Mel** and **Pat Oakes** had a very busy extended two weeks with a visit here in Austin from daughter **Mardie** and her son **Durham** and followed immediately with a visit to D.C. with daughter **Sarah** and her husband **Joe**. Two highlights of Mardie's visit were a trip to NASA to show rocket-loving Durham the real things and then re-visiting the 5th Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation where Mardie worked 15 years ago and seeing the progress that has been made since she was there. In D.C., Mel worked on house projects and both Pat and Mel visited relatives and friends. The weather finally cooperated and they took the metro in to see the cherry blossoms which were in glorious full bloom around the Tidal Basin.



**Durham Deifell and his mother Mardie Oakes in the bluebonnet field at Zilker Park**



**Cathy Hubbs, Greg Futch, Sara Ross, Jaime Hadley, Dennis Murphy flowering the cross on Easter Sunday**

### **Church Leadership**

Trustee Co-Chairs	Don Brown & Bill Campbell
Deacons Chair	Janet Parsons
Outreach Team	Reuel Nash & John Goff
Moderator Co-Chairs	Barbara Burnham & Bill Beardall
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Christian Education Coordinators	Rachel Dietz
Clerk	John Burlinson
Historian	Betty Bodman
Web mistress	Pat & Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Sara Ross
	Bill Beardall

### **Huston-Tillotson University Commencement Convocation May 9**

**Saturday, May 9, 8:30 a.m., Athletic Field**

Rep. Will Hurd (R-Texas) will render the Huston-Tillotson University Commencement Convocation address. Hurd, elected to the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2015, representing the 23<sup>rd</sup> District, which includes San Antonio and the southwestern portion of Texas currently serves on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and chairs the Information Technology Subcommittee. He also sits on the Committee on Homeland Security and is the vice chair of the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee.

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**Return Service Requested**

## June Visitor Deadline—May 21, 2015

### Meet CCA's New Office Manager! Rimma Aguirre



**Rimma Aguirre** has taken over the office manager position at the church. She is excited to help keep our congregation running smoothly! Rimma moved to Austin two years ago, after spending most of her life in Chicago. She was born in Odessa, Ukraine, in the former USSR. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was two years old. She speaks fluent Russian. Rimma worked as an elementary teacher and SAT/ACT test tutor both in Illinois and in Texas. She is an alto and sings with Chorus Austin. She and her family live in south Austin and often spend time at Zilker Park. She has a five-year-old son, Sam, who will be starting kindergarten at Barton Hills Elementary School this fall. She also has a five-year-old pit bull rescue, named Rosie, from Austin Pets Alive. Rimma loves to read sci-fi, fantasy, and murder mystery novels, watch Netflix, sing, solve puzzles, and roller skate. Stop by and say hello when you get a chance!