

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: ucausti@swbell.net Web site: congregational.faithweb.com

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

I love the desert and I love the mountains, and in the Guadalupe Mountains in west Texas and southern New Mexico, I can enjoy them both at the same time. In June, I'll be heading out to the Guadalupe Mountains to hike and camp, but mostly, to enjoy the silence and stillness of what Belden Lane calls "the solace of fierce landscapes." In a book by that title, Lane explores the relationship between apophatic spirituality and the physical, sensory, psychic, and emotional experience of climbing a mountain peak and being in a desert. Apophatic spirituality recognizes the inadequacy of concepts and language to describe God. Resting in silence and stillness, it opens to the expanse that exists beyond the curve of our own horizon. In our tradition, apophatic spirituality has long been associated with mountains and the desert, thus inspiring the formation of contemplative communities on hard-to-reach summits or in far-flung desert sands.

Within Christianity, those drawn to mountain and desert spirituality have always been a small minority, but to this day, some find themselves inexorably drawn to this spiritual way and to these locales. Lane is one such person, and so am I.



In his book, he writes, "In the practice of contemplation, one comes eventually to embrace an apophatic anthropology, letting go of everything one might have imagined as constituting the self--one's thoughts, one's desires, all one's compulsive needs. Joined in the silence of prayer to a God beyond knowing, I no longer have to scramble to sustain a fragile ego, but discern instead the source and ground of my being in the fierce landscape of God alone. One's self is ever a tenuous thing, discovered only in relinquishment. I recognize it finally as a vast, empty expanse opening onto the incomparable desert of God."

So, in a few weeks, I'll be sitting on the rock from which I took the picture above during my last retreat to the Guadalupe Mountains, or on another rock gazing in silence at some other expanse. Out there, I'm not "Tom" and

God isn't "God," at least not according to the usual definitions. All is simply what it is, prior to definitions, without beliefs.

Well, that'll be one of my summer excursions. I'll also be heading to Miami for a few days with some folks from Austin to check out a homelessness service center as part of my work with Austin Interfaith, and then Robin and I will be re-treating to another fierce landscape north of Taos in New Mexico for some silence and stillness, rest and relaxation.

I hope your summer goes well, and that you get to do whatever you really enjoy doing in the summer.

TOM

Job Openings and Volunteer Opportunities Meals and Wheels and More

Meals on Wheels and More is in need of temporary summer help. We have openings for meal delivery drivers beginning June 4- September 7th. Our temporary drivers deliver meals to the homebound using their own vehicle and must be at least 21 years old.

Hours:

Monday - Friday 10:00-1:30, Hourly rate + mileage reimbursement. EOE

Skills and Requirements:

If you would like to help your neighbors in need, have a dependable vehicle, map reading abilities, good driving record and clean CBC submit your resume online today at the Meals and Wheels and More website: <http://jobs.mealsonwheelsandmore.org/>

iACT Summer Refugee Program

Imagine arriving to the United States from a remote country- a country where your life was threatened, where you may have witnessed atrocities and lived in fear. You arrive in the US with a dizzying mixture of trepidation and excitement, of anticipation and longing. Now go one step further and imagine you are also a teenager with the age appropriate swagger, bravado and the underlying self-doubt. That is the situation for many youths, the children of refugees resettled in Austin.

iACT conducts a seven week summer program for refugee children newly arrived in Austin. This is led by two public school teachers who are hired specifically to lead the program and they are supported by volunteers. Our aim is to have up to 10 volunteers a day manning the work stations and interacting with the kids.

The purpose of the project is to teach newly arrived refugee children survival English, basic math, and the cultural skills involved in becoming successful at a school in this country. It will also give the children the opportunity to participate in organized leisure activities and to learn more about the culture of their new home. Most newly arrived refugees have had either limited schooling in refugee camps or have had their education interrupted because of war or upheaval in their countries, thus they are ill prepared for transition into American public schools. Most speak no English. Preventative programs such as ours are the best way to ensure that these youths do not become additional drop out statistics.

iACT conducts volunteer trainings in May and early June for those who want to help with the program. The next session is on May 31st for the preliminary orientation and on June 2 for the hands on training. Volunteers are asked to commit to at least one full week (Monday through Thursday, 9 am to 12 noon). Several people opt to volunteer with their children. This is enriching for both the young volunteer and the refugee kids. Children must be over the age of 12 , and those under 16 must volunteer with a parent or guardian at the same time.

For more information, please contact Lu Zeidan, the program coordinator, at [lzeidan\(AT\)interfaithtexas.org](mailto:lzeidan(AT)interfaithtexas.org).

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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

Personals by Pat Oakes

On a request for help through our newest member **Ranae Beeker**, a nurse at **Central Texas Medical Center in San Marcos**, our church returned a hospital patient to his village in Mexico. The hospital arranged for the Mexican Consulate to "cover" the patient with an official Mexican passport. The consulate people went to the hospital, photographed and fingerprinted him. Señor "X" was undocumented, picking crops here in the U.S. until he suffered a significant illness back in March. By May, he was sufficiently recovered to be sent home - but to where? He could not travel alone. In cooperation with the hospital, the Mexican Consulate in Mexico, as well as with **Tom Vandestadt**, **Liz Nash**, **Bill Beardall** and others' assistance and support, Don Miles accompanied the 71-year-old agricultural worker back to his home outside of **Tapachula** in southern Mexico, near the border with Guatemala. They left before dawn on Sun-

Very proud mom **Ranae Beeker** had a wonderful trip to **Massachusetts** in mid-May. She and her daughter **Alethea Beeker Robbins** went to Amherst to witness and celebrate the graduation of son/brother **Gavin** who graduated with honors from the **University of Massachusetts** with a major in history and a minor in philosophy. Great work, Gavin!



Good Samaritans (from left) Tom VandeStadt, Don Miles, Ranae Beeker, Bill Beardall, and Liz Nash.

day, **May 13**, and Don was back in Austin before midnight the next day. Personnel at the hospital told Ranae that U.S. Immigration and Customs authorities normally do not interfere with hospitals and churches carrying out clearly humanitarian activities such as this. Since the man was simply returned to Mexico upon his release from the hospital, the case for U.S. authorities is most likely "moot." Tom's sermon on Sunday, May 20th, praised the work of ordinary Christians in bringing the spirit of Christ to the world. Many thanks to the aforementioned — and to the members of the congregation who chipped in to help defray the costs.

Matt Blackstock has been at church on a regular basis this past month. He is still receiving cyber-knife treatment on spots where the melanoma has spread. He finds the treatments very tedious, but they are keeping him going.



Alethea Beeker Robbins, her brother Gavin, and their mother Ranae Beeker, graduation, May 11, 2012

We have missed seeing **Beth Gleason** in May, but she has been really busy. She preached in three different churches in May- **Hope United** for Mother's Day Sunday, a Presbyterian church in **Lakeway** on our mission efforts in El Salvador on the 20th, followed by her intern church, **Church of the Savior** on Memorial Day weekend while their pastor **Mary Wilson** was on vacation. Beth, we look forward to seeing you in June — no excuses!

Several years ago **Don Miles** realized that a significant anniversary of the **Battle of Puebla** (which is celebrated on **Cinco de Mayo**) was coming up soon. He wanted to do something special to further educate folks about the reason all those parties take place on **May 5**. He envisioned an 1860s military ball and a reenactment of the battle. **General Ignacio Zaragoza** was the winning general against the invading French in the Battle of Puebla, May 5, 1862. The battle was reenacted at **Camp Mabry** on both Saturday and Sunday, May 5 and 6. Don says, "This was the 150th anniversary of the original 1862 battle, and somehow the Mexicans just keep winning it no matter how hard the French try!" The group sponsoring the weekend's activities was Share the Culture, Inc., a non-profit which 3 Don founded several years ago to get the story straight and

get the history back into the schools. They had a professional photographer and a 3-camera video team covering the events, so there'll be more material available on all of it within the next few months.



Don Miles (left) with ladies in costume for the 1860s military ball celebrating Cinco de Mayo held at the Holiday Inn Lady Bird Lake. The other male figure is a dummy of General Ignacio Zaragoza, the winning general in the 1862 Battle of Puebla.

Anna Kimberley, our wonderful child caregiver, graduated from UT on May 19th with a Bachelors of Science in Human Development and Family Sciences with a concentration in early childhood development. She is now working at the **Helping Hand Home for Children** which is a



Robynne Heymans (left) and Anna Kimberley

residential treatment center for abused and neglected children. She is working in direct care with the children. She is so thrilled to stay in Austin and is looking forward to starting her job and making Austin her permanent home for awhile. Anna will be taking Robynne's place as Sunday school teacher as Robynne Heymans is moving to New York.

Lois Drachenberg is struggling after the death of her beloved husband **John**, 86, on April 28, in Florida. She is overwhelmed with paperwork and events are hitting her pretty hard, but she says she is getting there and is going to make it through this difficult time. Those of us who know Lois know how much spunk she has in spite of daunting health problems and now the loss of John. She is so grateful for the wonderful support and care she has received from friends, neighbors, and especially their new church family in Altamonte Springs. She extends her thanks to the many friends at our church who have sent her cards or called. She would still love to hear from folks. Her new address is 528 Royal Palm Court, Altamonte Springs, FL 32701.

Congratulations to **Jeffrey Lemley**, son of **George and Lynne Lemley** and big brother to **Katie**. He has been accepted into the environmental design program at the **Texas A&M College of Architecture**. He and his girlfriend **Allison Edwards** moved in mid-May to Bryan/College Station where they will both be attending classes. Allison is enrolled at Blinn Community College. Jeffrey will enter with many of his required courses done as he finished many core classes at ACC. This summer he will be taking a freshman drafting course, a 10 week summer module, and will be starting as a sophomore architecture student in the fall. The whole family is very excited as this is the culmination of a long-time dream of Jeffrey's! We will all be rooting for you, Jeffrey--even if it is A and M!



Our super-hero confirmands, (left to right) Katie Lemley, Cameron Goff, and Emily Howicz, collected more than 500 cans of food for Micah 6 for their Confirmand Canformation May 13, 2012.

On Mother's Day, the three confirmands of our church completed a huge food drive which benefitted **Micah 6**. Congratulations and many thanks to **Katie Lemley**, **Cameron Goff**, and **Emily Howicz** who have spearheaded this great project. (See photo on page 4)

Mother's Day was a combined celebration at the church. The men of the church arranged a delicious repast for coffee hour--and we all celebrated indomitable **Florence Castle's** 96th birthday which was also that very day. In addition to being feted by church members, Florence was joined by her son Paul and a good neighbor Heide Harris.



Heide Harris, Florence Castle, and her son Paul Castle, on Florence's 96th birthday, May 13, 2012.

Sarah Bentley has left her work at **Hospice Austin** after 6 years. She describes herself as "in pause mode, but everyone else says I have retired!" Husband **Bob Breihan** threw a surprise birthday and "thank you" for Sarah's years of ministry and she was truly surprised — she had no idea! Over 70 people attended — lots of laughter and love was shared by all. Bob and Sarah travelled to Phoenix to attend the graduation of grandson **Ben Lang**. Ben was in the prestigious **Barrett College** honors program at **Arizona State University**, was a **Flynn Scholar** (4-year scholarship to outstanding high school grads within Arizona), and will begin medical school at the **University of Washington** in Seattle. They also spent three beautiful days with Ben's parents in Flagstaff, where they live -- overnight temp of 31 degrees. Bob will retire (really) for the third and final time on June 1. This will be the first time in 64 years that he has not requested an appointment (placement) from the bishop of the **Southwest Texas United Methodist Conference**. Enjoy!

Barbara Burnham's new address is 10221 Brantley Bend, Austin, TX 78748. It's on the southern edge of town and backs up to a greenbelt. She loves the friendly neighborhood. The house is adorable, too, with a great

landlord. But her very favorite thing so far is the small park with a pond for ducks and geese just around the corner. Actually, the fowl hang out wherever they please, which can include her yard and the neighbors'. Last week a mother duck was parading her new babies all over the neighborhood, including their yards! They counted 11. The babies follow the mother all in a line. She is also thrilled that her son **Robin** and his family--wife **Julia** and baby **Samantha** moved back to Austin in late May! They will stay with **Barbara** until Rob finishes painting the "old" house that will be their new address.

Geneva Ross and her husband **Michael Neberman** have also moved. They have decided to downsize and, to their delight, sold their old home with its huge back yard in a bidding war. Their new address is 12305 Bedrock Trail, Austin, TX 78727. Their son **Ian** is currently working on a film project in Montana.

Another new address is that of **Ricky** (grandson of pastor emeritus John Towery) and **Monica Masters** and their daughter A.J. They have recently moved to 1110 CR 410, Taylor, TX 76574 and are enjoying their new home in the country.

John Burlinson was taken to the ER in mid-May with chest pains/shortness of breath. He stayed in the hospital undergoing tests which showed nothing much wrong with his heart, until one doctor insisted on a cardiac catheterization. The test showed 80-90 percent blockage in a major coronary artery - a heart attack waiting to happen. He had two stents inserted and is doing much better now. **Carol** and **John's** son **Jake** says things have been fairly quiet lately (as of May 22) at his base in Afghanistan - that can change quickly, though.



Jake Burlinson's company in Afghanistan.

Carol and Fred Scott are continuing "adjustments" to life in a smaller space in their home in Kansas. Carol is hoping that her redecorating projects will soon be finished. They attended an annual art show recently (probably our favorite of those) and visited with an artist whose work Carol had seen in Texas. Previously he has lived in Oregon; he is now spending more of his time in Austin.

Brazos Association News

June 2012

by Liz Nash

On July 10 – 13, 28 youth and adults will join with our **South Central Conference** group and **United Church of Christ** youth from all over the US at the **UCC National Youth Event at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana**. We will meet new friends from churches like and unlike ours (reflecting the diversity of UCC practices and congregations); hear outstanding and inspirational speakers; participate in all kinds of workshops; be part of worship that praises God through energizing music, dance, movement, and preaching; and play together. Most of us from the South Central Conference will spend plenty of time on the buses going there and back, too. If this National Youth Event is anything like the last one held four years ago, it will be one of the most memorable and influential faith experiences of our lives.

We are a small Association of 13 churches, yet we are sending a group of youth and adults from several of our churches and our group forms nearly half of the group going from the South Central Conference. Why is that? It is because of the support of the participating churches, the hard work raising money of the kids and their youth leaders, and your generosity. Our **Association Executive Board** has, over the past four years, set aside a substantial amount of money each year toward National Youth Event scholarships, and we have received a generous amount from your offerings at the Brazos Association Fall and Spring Meetings this past year. We are using that money to help with transportation costs, paying for a good portion of the bus costs to travel to Purdue. The fund raising task for these groups has been large to raise registration fees and, combined with transportation, could have been overwhelming. But your help has made it possible for many to go. This is a great testament to our support of each other and of our young people as a covenant community of the wider church. Thank you – and we hope to give you a great report about the event.

I have joyous news to share about an upcoming ordination. **Nikki Williams Stahl**, who has been called and is serving as the **Associate Pastor for Congregational Care at United Christian** in Austin, will be ordained to the Christian ministry in the United Church of Christ on **Sunday, June 24th, at 3 pm at United Christian**. Nikki has chosen to have a brief indoor ordination service followed by an outdoor celebration with fun and games for kids and adults. You are all invited to come dressed in casual clothes to enjoy the day. In the United Church of Christ, the Association ordains ministers, so we hope many of you

can come to bless Nikki's ministry. She was approved for ordination at her **Ecclesiastical Council** at the **Brazos Association Spring Meeting** last month.

Currently and in the coming summer months, two of our pastors are/will be on sabbatical. **Mary Wilson** has traveled in Europe in the month of May during her sabbatical from her ministry at **Church of the Savior**, with new Associate **Minister Jordan Dollar** filling in for her at this time. Later this summer, **Dan DeLeon** will be taking his sabbatical from **Friends Congregational** with Karen Nelson set to serve as the interim sabbatical minister. Dan has received a Brown grant from the UCC for a time of study in **Cuernavaca, Mexico**. Congratulations to Dan. We send our prayers and best wishes to Dan to have a tremendous time of study and learning.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister

Thank You

Thanks again to those of you who provided food for the **Micah 6 Street Youth Drop-in Center** dinner on Sunday, April 29th. We fed a hearty and healthy meal (lots of seconds and thirds were eaten) to 25 people — the largest group yet in the Sunday drop in. Our next meal from **Congregational Church** is scheduled for Sunday, August 19. Contact Liz Nash at lizknash@gmail.com if you would like to be part of the food prep team.

David Cleaver-Batholomew reports a couple of pieces of news from **Manlius, New York**. Dena (an Episcopal priest) and David's oldest daughter, **Audrey** (who is now 17!) was selected to attend a special writing program at the **University of Iowa** this summer called *Between the Lines (BTL)*. Since 2008, the **International Writing Program** has hosted *BTL*, a program that brings young writers, aged 16-19, to the University of Iowa for creative writing study and cultural interaction. It runs from July 13-27 and is sponsored by the International Writing Program. Her cultural focus and interaction will be with students from Arabic speaking areas (e.g., Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Palestine) and Arabic literature. She is very excited and so are they! A second piece of news is that David giving up on his job search for a church (he was ordained at our church some years ago after serving as our intern) after 2 1/2 years and returning to school. He is going to pursue a degree in Accounting in the hope of being able to find a full time job by the time Audrey goes to college in the fall of 2013. He has not been able to come up with a full time position in either ministry or academia, and there is nothing on the horizon. So, it's back to school

to retrain himself. David says, "Even at 52, life doesn't cease to be an adventure!" Many of us still remember David and his good work with us, so we all wish him well!

Mel and Pat Oakes are delighted to announce the arrival of their grandson **Durham Oakes Deifell** on May 6, 2012, first child of of **Mardie Oakes** and her husband **Tony Deifell**, in San Francisco. He weighed 7 pounds and was 20 1/2 inches long. Everyone had to wait a whole week for a name while Mardie and Tony got to know him, but they decided on Durham just in time for Mother's Day. If you are reading this on line, here is his birth announcement (<http://vimeo.com/42072191>). Mel and Pat flew out to San Francisco for a week on May 22nd to meet Durham. Mardie and Tony wanted time to bond with the baby before they had company. The Oakes' other daughter, Beth, and her family moved to a new home in Iowa City on May 19th. Their new address is Oakes/Buck, 1104 Wild Prairie Drive, Iowa City, IA 52246. Their phone number remains the same. Daughter **Sarah** and her husband Joe are looking forward to the end of Sarah's school year in mid-June.

Midwifery in Nicaragua

Dorothy Granada, retired nurse and beloved American expatriate in Nicaragua will be in Austin at University Presbyterian Church at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 10th to talk about her midwife project in Nicaragua with the goal of reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. She is an amazing lady with a fascinating history. Contact: Donna Bowling, dcbowling@earthlink.net

Sunday, June 10th

5:30-7:00 pm

**University Presbyterian Church, Fellowship Hall
2203 San Antonio Street, Austin Texas**

"SKILLS TO SAVE LIVES"

A program in support of poor women in rural Nicaragua

"The health care system in Nicaragua has improved greatly, yet poor women continue to die as a result of preventable illness during pregnancy and giving birth. Our work assists those at the forefront of rural health care: Traditional Midwives and Community Health Workers"

Dorothy is an internationally acclaimed nurse, health promoter and human rights activist who has worked for over 25 years with the rural poor in Nicaragua. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her work to promote peace and justice through health, including:

- **The International Pfeffer Peace Prize of the Fellowship of Reconciliation**
- **Dr. Hugo Behm Award of the Central American Institute of International Health**
- **Global Health Council Best Practices in Community Health Award**
- **The Order of Rubén Darío of the Government of Nicaragua**
- **Honorary Doctorate of Divinity, General Theological Seminary, New York**

For more information, visit <http://nicahealth.org>
or call Janice Smith at 409-771-0072

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Austin, Texas 78705-5214

Return Service Requested

Deadline for July Visitor—June 22

June Calendar

Nodie Murphy is still looking for folks who can share **worship gifts** to enrich our Sunday service. Do you write poetry? Sing? Have a favorite hymn that we never sing? How about a short skit which illustrates a good message? Do you play an instrument? Please contact Nodie Murphy if you are willing to share one of your gifts with us.

The **CCA Meditation** group will meet on **Thursday, June 7**, from 7:30 to 9:00 pm, at the home of Sharon Brown. If you'd like to join us for some time of stillness and silence, followed by conversation, consider yourself invited. If you have any questions about the group, talk to Tom V. or Sharon B.

The next **Interfaith Environmental Network** symposium, **Finding our Place in Nature**, will be held on **Tuesday, June 5**, 7:00 pm, at Congregation Beth Israel, on 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd. **Tom VandeStadt** will moderate a panel discussion with four speakers: **Ksoho McCall** (Austin Zen Center), **Imam Islam Mosaad** (North Austin Muslim Community Center), **Barbara Budde** (Catholic Diocese of Austin), and **Rabbi Rachel Kobrin** (Congregation Agudas Achim).

The Sixth Annual Customer Assistance Program Low-Income Energy Summit will take place on **Thursday, June 28, 2012** from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at the **Sheraton Austin Hotel at the Capitol**, 701 East 11th Street. Registration is required for this event. To register go to: www.austinenergy.com/go/caps Summit Sandra Castillo, Community Services Coordinator, Austin Energy.