

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

In a recent sermon, I reflected on the fear I felt when my brother-in-law pressed me into service on his sailing team for a race in Narragansett Bay. I don't like sailing. And I was scared, especially when the boat tipped so far to one side it felt like it would either capsize or fill with water and end up at the bottom of the sea with me still in it tangled up in rope. The fear I experienced was not a voluntary reaction. I couldn't decide not to be scared. So unaccustomed was my central nervous system to the fast motion at odd angles over choppy water that it set off all kinds of internal



alarm bells and red alert signals, producing a number of responses from shortness of breath to white-knuckled grasping to tightness in my gut to rapid heartbeat to heightened alertness....all at the same time!

I related my experience to the story in Mark's Gospel in which the disciples freaked out when caught in a storm while sailing across the Sea of Galilee at night. Four of the guys on the boat were fishermen, guys experienced with winds, waves, and nautical weather. They were probably the first to realize it was insane to be out there in that storm. No boat could survive such a battering without capsizing, taking on too much water and sinking, or tossing a few unlucky souls overboard. Talk about kicking into FULL PANIC MODE. The disciples were terrified. Their central nervous systems blew fuses and suffered meltdowns. In desperation, they awoke Jesus from his peaceful slumber and yelled, "don't you even care?"

Jesus, jolted from a pleasant dream, felt the sting of wet wind slap his face, took in the fury of watery chaos all around him, noted that the sea was lapping over the sides of the boat and rising to his disciples' knees, and studied the fear-stricken faces of those same men as he listened to them shriek. Then he shouted loudly with confidence, "hey, put a muzzle on it!"

The wind stopped; not a whisper. The water was a mirror; not a ripple. Jesus and his disciples sat in the boat. It was very quiet. Very still. Eerie. Finally, Jesus broke the silence. "Why so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Jesus seemed to imply, "you guys were overwhelmed with fear, stricken with fear, debilitated by fear, because you didn't have faith. If you had faith, you wouldn't have panicked. If you had faith, you wouldn't have lost your grip. If you had deep, abiding, and pervasive faith, you wouldn't have freaked out."

Is that true?

If the disciples had faith, would their central nervous systems have remained calm and less reactive? Would they have been able to sit through the storm without panicking and going to pieces? Was that why Jesus was able to sleep so soundly on his pillow through the storm—his faith was so deep, so pervasive, so thoroughly integrated into his psyche, his nervous system, his body, that his involuntary systems didn't go haywire, but instead remained calm, still, and peaceful?

Is that a lesson we can take from this story—that's it's possible to have faith so deep, so pervasive, so thoroughly integrated into our psyches, our nervous systems, our bodies, that we can remain at peace within, even when we're under incredible stress? Rather than reacting out of fear, being controlled by fear, freaking out with fear, or being debilitated by fear, can faith enable us to remain calm and still, level-headed and brave-hearted, so we can respond to stressful situations with love and wisdom, with compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, with something more Christ-like than fear?

It's a lesson I take from this story. Faith isn't simply something in which we believe, but something in which, or someone in whom, we place our trust. And trust is far more visceral than belief. Can I trust God, trust Christ, trust Holy Spirit, trust the mystery of grace, trust life, trust my own soul in a manner so deep, so abiding, so pervasive that I *react* less from fear, and *act* more like Christ? Can I access, open to, cultivate, or surrender to a trust so deep, so abiding, so pervasive that my central nervous system is actually transformed? Can I undergo a transformation so deep and so pervasive that my internal make-up and functioning are renovated in ways that enable me to act voluntarily in a Christ-like manner rather than react to involuntary internal alarm bells and alert signals? If so, that's a deep and profound transformation. That's far more than changing how we think or what we believe. That's being transformed in who we are and how we operate in this world. A truly radical change of heart and mind.

In my understanding of Christianity, this is the "spiritual path" upon which Christ seeks to lead us. One that's deeply radical and transformational. One that renews who we are and how we function. And as I look around today, I see us facing many stressful situations, both as individuals and as a human community, situations that call for radical transformation in who we are and how we function. Reacting out of fear, or being debilitated by fear, won't serve us, humanity, or the planet well. Embodying trust so we may be a calm, still, and peaceful presence in the storm, with a level head and a brave heart, and a spirit of Christ-like wisdom and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, will serve us, others, and the earth much better. Even if we should find our own lives in peril, as Jesus most certainly did, faith will prove more healing and reconciling than fear.

TOM

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

Sanctuary Restored

University United Methodist Church, [Heimsath Architects](#) and their project team have won a **Preservation Texas** award for the restoration of the Sanctuary at 24th and Guadalupe Streets. It was originally built in **1909**. The Historic Restoration Award recognizes historic residential, commercial, or institutional buildings or structures that have been restored to their original glory.

The sanctuary's white limestone walls and red tile roofs set the style for many of the University of Texas buildings that grew up around it. **Architect Ben Barnes** describes it as one of the outstanding buildings in the city. During the restoration, each of the red tiles on the roof was numbered, removed and restored and put back together in order.

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Personals by Pat Oakes

On Saturday, June 9, twenty (a record crowd!) of the members of the men's and women's book clubs gathered at **Fran and Rambie Briggs'** home on Lake Travis to enjoy the lovely surroundings and to share poetry. There was a wide variety of selections --classics, modern, and wonderful original poetry by **Fran Briggs, Bill Briggs, Greg Futch, and Bill Phillips. Mel Oakes** read some lively limericks in memory of **Ben White**, who loved limericks and read quite a selection every year at the gathering. Poetry reading got underway about 10:15 a.m. and, after sharing a number of poems, folks adjourned for a delicious lunch.



Poetry on the Lake with Bill Briggs, Frank Falkstein, Sam and Nancy Sutherland, Lynne and Katie Lemley, Mel Oakes, David Ross, Greg Futch, Bill Phillips, Geneva, (B. Phillips behind Geneva) Sara Ross, Rambie Briggs, Cathy Hubbs, Al Lindsey, Ranae Beeker and Susan Lindsey (hidden). Fran Briggs in foreground.



Rambie Briggs with Cathy Hubbs at the Poetry on the Lake gathering.

The church family bade a fond farewell on June 3 to our Sunday school teacher of several years, **Robynne Heymans**, who has decided to move to New York City. She did a great deal to build our Sunday school program and has been much loved by her students. Our child caregiver (who graduated from UT in May), **Anna Kimberley**, has been promoted to Sunday school teacher and we have a new child care giver, **Thaisa Holworth**.



Megan Goff with Ro Robynne Heymans.

Fran and Rambie Briggs' grandchildren **Giovanni and Stella Fracasso** had a wonderful time going on tour with their musician father in June while **Paula** stayed home in Austin. Michael, Giovanni, and Stella visited **Hot Springs, St. Louis, Memphis, and Auntie Marcia in Steubenville, Ohio**, before going on to **Niagara Falls**. Michael had some gigs along the way including NYC. Giovanni called his grandparents after the day in Niagara Falls with this report:

"The American side is really rocky and loud and straight down. The Canadian side is like a horseshoe. We saw the tightrope the guy is going to walk on on Saturday. We also saw the practice one in the parking lot. The one in the parking lot didn't look too hard. We walked down a path under the falls and Stella looks like she took a shower. This guy in **Canada** pulled a U-turn right in the middle of the street and there was a Canadian police officer right there. In his car. We all saw him, why didn't that guy? The ice cream parlor has tiramisu flavor."

Carol and Fred Scott enjoyed an evening with **Nodie Murphy** in **Kansas City** on June 25th. Nodie was in KC for a church music conference and took advantage of the proximity to Carol and Fred's to visit with them. Earlier in that week our marvelous cellist **Colin Ferguson** was also in Kansas City auditioning for a position with the **Kansas City Symphony**.



Fred and Carol Scott enjoyed visiting with Nodie Murphy while she was in Kansas City for a church music conference.

Our former church pianist, **Aaron Carter-Cohn**, has been the acting (interim) organist/minister of music at **First Congregational Church of Elyria, Ohio**, this past spring. He will be leaving his position there this summer to start his Ph.D. work in Music Theory and Cognition at **Ohio State University in Columbus** with full financial support and a two course per semester teaching assignment. They are granting him a leave of absence for Spring 2013 for a **Fulbright** full research grant in Music Theory to Lagos, Nigeria, to study the connection between spoken prosody (tone and rhythm) and music in **Niger-Congo** languages. Then he will return to OSU in Fall 2013 — that's the plan anyway!

Talley Summerlin writes, "When we arrived in New Jersey we had an earthquake, a hurricane and an October snowstorm - and it has not let up since. As I write this, **Elizabeth (Freese)** is finishing up her final paper of the first year of her PhD coursework. She has been making straight A's and loving 'being a part of the conversation' in her field. She is looking forward to spending some down time with the girls this summer. **Rose and Vivian** adjusted quickly to dorm life and their new school. They have many on-campus and off-campus friends. Their grades are great and they've been busy with lots of extracurricular activities as well including karate, chorus, yoga, and a fantastic African dance class that they loved. After 8 months working remotely for my Austin employer I took a new job in New York City in late April. I work for a mid-sized

PR firm called **Emanate** and I commute by train every day - a massive change from riding my bike to work in Austin and working in our living room here in the **Drew University** dorm. I have to rise for the 7:08 to **Penn Station** every day! I walk 15 minutes to the station, ride the train for about 45-50 minutes and then walk another 30-35 minutes - so it takes a while but I get plenty of exercise and reading time. The girls and I dove in head first to **Stanley Congregational Church** in nearby **Chatham** and have found a new church home there. That said, we miss you all terribly! **Stanley Congregational**, like the entire church body nationally, is going through major changes and I am part of a vision team designed to shake things up. Our experience with you in Austin is helping in this process and I am often able to bring up examples of 'how we did things - and tried new things - in Austin...' Those are the highlights! PLEASE send everyone our love and we'll try to not wait a full year to catch you up again."

Recently **Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers** took Amtrak to **St. Louis** to help Marilyn's cousin and wife celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary. Also, it was a mini-reunion of Marilyn's mother's family. Then off to **College Station** to help George's AF buddy and wife celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary. Yes, they were just teenagers when they wed! Grandson, **Jonathan Carruthers**, was named "Canyon Ridge Middle School Concert Bandsman of the Year!" At the year-end concert, members of the **Vandegrift High School Band** played a number that Jonathan had arranged! He's now starting string bass lessons on "Suzy Q," his grandmother Marilyn's 61-year-old bass viol that has been refurbished for him! Marilyn, old-timers at the church remember when you played Suzy Q with the **Joyful Noise Band!**

Mel and Pat Oakes enjoyed a marvelous week in **San Francisco** with a mini family reunion. **Mardie and Tony** and their new baby boy **Durham** (6 weeks old on Father's Day) were the magnets for the occasion (although the city of San Francisco is a pretty terrific magnet, too!). **Sarah and Joe** came in from Washington D.C. and **Beth, Eugene, Emily, and Ethan** came in from Iowa. There was a constant line for whose turn it was to hold Durham, the "boys" attended an Oakland A's ballgame (defeating the Dodgers handily) while the "girls" had pedicures (Durham hung with the girls), everyone enjoyed the **Exploratorium, Fisherman's Wharf, and Fort Mason**, delicious meals were prepared and enjoyed together, and tears were shed when they all had to go home carrying lots of great memories with them.

Florence Jordan, Betty Bodman's mother, lives in the Summit near **Barton Creek Mall**. She has had significant back pain that an infusion of glue into a compressed disk

has not solved. She has moved to assisted living. Hopefully they will find a way to make her comfortable.

Whit Bodman spent nine days sailing a 36' sailboat in Alaska with **Kristin Saldine**, a colleague from the seminary, and two others who had never sailed and Whit had not met before. It worked out wonderfully. They played with whales, seals, sea otters and porpoises by the dozens. They watched mountain goats, including one energetic kid, feeding above a cataract, with a male billy supervising from a high ledge. The cruise was along the coast of the **Kenai Peninsula**, where the mountains were all snow-capped and the glaciers rumbling and cracking. It was all wilderness. They saw no houses or signs of human habitation after leaving port, and only the occasional tour boat or kayaker. It was chilly - they usually had three to five layers of clothing on, but they had hot food and a warm (usually) cabin. There were two afternoons when Whit could wear shorts for a while. Amazing, stark and vast landscape.

Whit and Betty's daughter, **Elizabeth**, is getting married on **August 11th**. Every week brings emails suggesting one more thing that they could do for the wedding. This week the assignments were to design T-shirts for the Bodman team in the prenuptial kick-ball game, and to remember stories about her childhood that they could tell anonymously so that guests could guess whether the story was about Elizabeth or Greg: Which child believed that s/he was Indian royalty and demanded to be returned to the tribe? Which child slept in a closet between his/her room and the parents' room for months? Which child for years would work at her/his desk half-standing? Whit is not giving it away, but he doesn't know anything about Greg's childhood.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Service-based interfaith activism is perhaps the most effective and impactful way to build genuine relationships among people from different faith traditions. In my experience, the **Hands on Housing program at iACT** happens to be one of the best ways to engage in this kind of service-based interfaith 'dialogue' in central Texas.

Throughout the year, **Hands on Housing** brings together groups of people from various faith traditions and gets them physically involved with helping a local resident who needs home repairs and improvements. The work is hard. It is manual labor that makes us dirty, sweaty and tired. But those of us who participate in these projects do so willingly. We look forward to the opportunity to step away from our computer screens and engage in real human contact as we act out the cherished values of our faith.



Whit Bodman at the helm of a sailboat in Alaska.

It is this kind of interfaith work - where we are in the trenches together, building understanding as a byproduct of our service - that forms the strongest bonds between us. Through **Hands on Housing** I have met some of the most extraordinary people from different religious backgrounds, and had the honor of serving some of Austin's oldest and most austere residents.

These relationships have extended far beyond the work projects we've done at **Hands on Housing**. We've formed true friendships that have grown stronger throughout the years. As such, we are weaving a truly beautiful fabric of Austin society, with a unique pattern that shows the world the very best in all our faith traditions.

*by Amanda Quraishi,
Muslim blogger, interfaith activist
and technology professional
at Mobile Loaves & Fishes*

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Brazos Association News

Summer 2012

by Liz Nash

Many of us gathered June 1-3 for fellowship, business, and worship at our **Conference Annual Meeting** in **New Braunfels**. We heard dynamic preaching and speaking from **Ron Buford**, former *Still Speaking* initiative leader for the United Church of Christ and currently on the staff of the historic **Old South Church of Boston**. The ministry at Old South has continued since the birthing days of our nation, yet it remains faithful and dynamic with the diverse urban population of central Boston. It was inspiring to hear him. We voted on a budget, as always, and also to support reorganization of the national UCC entities, streamlining their governing boards by combining several of them into one group that works together. This combination will save substantial money for travel for board members since the numbers of members will be smaller, and should coordinate and facilitate their work together.

Churches from the **Brazos Association** posted displays at Annual Meeting from our mission work on the *Mission Local* table, designed to share ideas about our outreach witness and work in our communities. **St. Peter's Coupland** displayed ties from their "Ugly Tie" contest, in which folks from the church (including kids) used ugly ties to raise funds for local giving. **Pastor John Sumner** wore the ugliest tie, which was worth some money! **St. John's Burton**, had a display including their work with the multi-church **Bridge Ministry** with food donation and distribution, a thrift shop/clothing outreach, and lunch for seniors at St. John's; their church's education and advocacy toward ending human trafficking, and the **El Salvador** mission trip members went on with members of Congregational Church of Austin. **Congregational Church** had a display centered around a photo of their spring loaded spigot, the only public water source in the area for the many homeless street youth there (also used by police on bikes and construction workers); their outreach to homeless youth with **Lifeworks** and a twice monthly lunch; their active partnership with the local **Micah 6** churches providing a large food pantry, shelter on freezing nights (at Congregational Church), and a street youth drop-in center; and their membership and leadership within **Austin Interfaith**, a community organizing group that advocates within the city in many areas. Let's continue to share ideas like these!

We have several churches with ambitious plans in progress to expand and improve their buildings. **St. Peter's Coupland** is raising money to move, improve, and expand their kitchen – a project which will involve lowering their stage. **St. John's Burton** is finishing a lovely landscape project for an outdoor prayer and meditation area in the

center yard of their buildings. **Friends Congregational** is working on a long-planned capital renovation project to expand and improve their buildings and sanctuary. **United Christian** is beginning the planning process for a major building renovation and expansion with the aim of enlarging their sanctuary to accommodate their congregation, which outgrew the current sanctuary a few years ago. Good but challenging work for these churches to help them expand their ministries.

Our prayers and blessings go with **Dan DeLeon** as he begins his sabbatical later this summer. Also, our prayers and blessings go with our youth from several of the Brazos Association churches as they go to the **National Youth Event** in mid July.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister

Also, mark your calendars for the **Fall Meeting of the Brazos Association**. The meeting will be held on **Saturday morning, Oct. 13** at **Weimar UCC**.

"I Live"

a poem by Mike Blair, Friend of iACT and former member of iACT's Board of Directors

I live inside the tallest trees
Within the rising sun
I am the down that lines the nest
Where mothers raise their young

I am the very lightest breeze
I paint the roses red
I am the softly fallen leaves
Where nature goes to bed

I am the ant, the grain of sand
The pebble and the bee
Look inside the smallest thing
And there discover Me

There is no place your feet will go
No sight your eyes will see
There is no sound your ears will hear
No thing that is not Me

I am beside you right and left
Below you and above
You cannot go where I am not
You can't escape My love

Micah 6 Needs Volunteers by Liz Nash

Our **Micah 6 Street Youth** ministry is in real need of volunteers. We are short staffed and want to be able to get to a sustainable number of staff people. The commitment is from about 1:45 to 6:30 pm (drop in open from 2-6) on Sunday afternoons. You can "tag team" with another volunteer if you find someone you can partner with to have one stay for an early shift and one for a later shift if you want to set that up with a friend. The work is some minor set up, being there with the youth and young adults, helping serve dinner, and helping with the clean up at 6 pm. To volunteer, sign up through the Micah 6 Street Youth website: <http://m6sydic.weebly.com/index.html>. Email Liz Nash with questions at lizknash@gmail.com. (She will be a little slow responding while traveling until July 15.)

We also need people to volunteer to bring dinner for the Street Youth drop in. Our church is bringing it on August 19, so we will need volunteers to help prepare food. Other dates are open, too, if you want to fix a meal or get a group together to do that. Contact **Liz Nash** by email if you want to help with the Aug. 19 meal. If you would be willing to coordinate fixing a different meal, read about the meals at <http://m6sydic.weebly.com/index.html> and contact **Sue Moss** (the meal coordinator) at SWMMPC@aol.com to get the current schedule for open dates. We have been feeding 25 people the past few weeks, with people eating plenty of seconds and thirds. We try to serve a meal with plenty of good protein, green veggies and/or salad, a starch, and a nice dessert. It needs to be there by 3:30 unless more than an hour of thawing/heating is needed, and it is served at 4:30.

Last but certainly not least, the **Micah 6** food pantry needs more volunteers over the summer than usual, since the UT student volunteers are not available. The pantry is open Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. If you are willing to volunteer, visit the Micah 6 website for information about how to do that. You would be welcomed!

Liz Nash
Micah 6 Board from Congregational Church

Annual Meeting Report by Beth Gleason

The **New Braunfels Convention Center** was filled with UCC clergy and lay folks the weekend of June 1-3 to hear keynote speaker, **Rev. Ron Buford**, the architect of the UCC's "God is Still Speaking" campaign. Ron is currently serving as Interim Minister for Discipleship at the historic Old South Church in Boston and his message, carried throughout the conference workshops, was that all things (meaning change) are possible in our UCC churches. His message resonated with the Annual Meeting theme of "Through Resurrection's Eyes," based on Luke 24:31. The Annual Meeting was hosted by the **South Central Conference** (San Antonio & environs) and chaired by **Rev. Gerry Metzger**.

Media and church building were popular topics in workshops this year. **Rev. Ron Trimmer** from Georgetown's **Hope UCC** led a workshop on **Viro Christianity**. Many folks enjoyed a tour of outstanding UCC projects such as the **Eden Hill** retirement community, which is in an expansion phase, and we toured **Slumber Falls** camp. Of course, business pertinent to Annual Meeting was also conducted . . . reports were given, new committee volunteers were installed, a budget was passed and our conference financial statements are in the black. **Rev. Liz Nash** organized a display booth on our **El Salvador** trips with prompts for UCC churches to join us in 2013! As Conference Minister Douglas Anders, stated "One of the greatest gifts we have in this Conference is spirit, covenantal spirit . . . we are in the UCC for a reason and there is a blessing when we stand together and work for the common good." Indeed, as the apostle Paul says, when one rejoices, all rejoice, and Annual Meeting is a time for just that. Thank you for allowing me to be CCA's lay delegate in 2012.

Beth Gleason

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for September Visitor—August 21

Calendar

The Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at **The University of Texas at Austin**, continues the exhibition *The King James Bible: Its History and Influence*. The event, presented by the Ransom Center and the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, is free and open to the public. Seating is limited. Line forms upon arrival of the first patron, and doors open 30 minutes in advance. A live webcast of this program will be available at www.hrc.utexas.edu/webcast. Information about the exhibition, future programs, and booking a tour, is available at <http://budurl.com/univorg> NOTE—This exhibit concludes on July 29, 2012.