

THE VISITOR

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

So far this year, over 52,000 unaccompanied children, primarily from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, have entered the US along the southwestern border, particularly in Texas. Some estimate the number could reach 70,000 or more by the end of the year. Given that the mainstream media has only recently begun to focus on this issue, one could get the impression that Central American children crossing our border is a new phenomenon. And the way many politicians and pundits are publically spinning the issue for political gain, many in our country now believe



these children are heading north because our President has promised them amnesty. Neither case is true.

Though there's been a recent surge, the uptick in children from Central America trying to cross our border began several years ago. In 2012, the Women's Refugee Commission published a report entitled, *Forced from Home, The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America*, documenting the unprecedented increase in the number of unaccompanied children migrating to the US from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador beginning in 2011. The report cited violence and poverty as the main reasons children were leaving their countries. "Children from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador cited the growing influence of youth gangs and drug cartels as their primary reason for leaving.

Not only are they subject to violent attacks by gangs, they explained, but they are also targeted by police, who assume out of hand that all children are gang-affiliated. Girls also face gender-based violence, as rape becomes increasingly a tool of control. Children from Guatemala cited rising poverty, poor harvests and continuing unemployment as reasons for migrating. Almost all of the children's migration arose out of long-standing, complex problems in their home countries—problems that have no easy or short-term solutions... These children exhibited both an urgent need to escape and an incredible will to survive. Most of them expressed a 'necessity' for leaving their home, indicating more 'push' than 'pull' factors for their decision to migrate."

So while there may be rumors circulating throughout Central America about "*permisos*" and the ability to stay here once a child arrives, the primary motive driving most of these children out of their country of origin is survival. If your house is on fire, and you hear a rumor that your neighbors several doors down will let you in if you make it over there, the rumor is not the primary reason you show up on their doorstep.

Unfortunately, the immigration issue in this country is now so politicized by bitter partisan rancor, and our political culture and discourse so poisoned by misinformation and outright lies, we're failing as a nation to adequately respond to the plight of *children* who're fleeing for their lives. Some of the public narratives framing this issue reflect little to no empathy for these children. There's very little serious analysis in the mainstream press addressing why these children are risking their lives to come here. And there's no recognition that the US had a hand in creating the violently unjust Central American societies from which these children are now fleeing. To the extent they know at all, people in the US are conveniently forgetting what our nation did to these countries, especially from the 1950s through the 1980s. And now we're indignant that their children are showing up at our border, fleeing the violence and poverty we won't admit we helped

create. Responding in knee-jerk fashion, we're seeking to increase our own security and fast-track the process of sending these children back into the fire. President Obama couldn't have been any clearer: "Do not send your children to the borders. If they do make it, they'll get sent back."

Six years ago, the **Center for Public Policy Priorities** issued a report highly critical of the manner in which the US repatriates children. Noting that the US deports tens of thousands of children every year, the report stated that "The current US systems for removing unaccompanied children from the United States often fail to provide these children with basic rights. In implementation, the current system disregards the protections included in numerous international agreements, returns children to unsafe conditions, and does not take proactive measures to deter increased future child migration. This reality erodes our nation's moral authority and undermines international relations." And now we're going to "fast-track" these systems.

If I sound angry, it's because I am. For me, children currently streaming north from Central America is just the latest chapter in the very disturbing history of our nation's dominating and unjust relationship with Central America. At this point, I'm not sure what to do with my anger other than confess it. I've heard that **Texas Impact** and **Austin Interfaith** may be crafting some kind of response to the situation. If you find this issue disturbs you, even angers you, please let me know. Maybe together, we can find some constructive outlet.

TOM

Church Leadership

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



Our pastor, Tom VandeStadt, at the Austin City Council meeting on June 26th.

Pastor **Tom VandeStadt** spoke for **Austin Interfaith** and other immigration reform advocates during an Austin City Council meeting on Thursday, June 26. He spoke in favor of a proposal to "research options to minimize or completely replace" the Austin Police Department's use of Travis County's Central Booking facility. At issue is the Travis County Sherriff's participation in the "Secure Communities" program, which checks the legal immigration status of those accused of even the most minor offenses. If they are deemed to be in the country unlawfully, ICE begins deportation proceedings. Austin City Council voted unanimously in favor of the proposal, thus sending a clear message that it opposes the Secure Communities program. (photo by Victoria Li.)



Carol Barrett came by to visit Pat and Mel Oakes.

Personals by Pat Oakes

Pastor emeritus **John Towery** enjoyed a visit recently with **Pat and Mel Oakes** who were on their way to **Vicksburg**. Son **Ches** came over for the visit and they all had a good time catching up on family news. Ches has retired and is enjoying looking for new things to do—including spending time with his new grandson **Benjamin--K.C. and Kendra Towery** are the proud parents.



John and Ches Towery enjoyed visiting with Mel Oakes at the Cottages of Chandler Creek in Round Rock .

Alex VandeStadt is having a wonderful time in **Barcelona** for two months this summer. She is living with a family, taking classes, and traveling as much she can. Her roommates include a girl from California and two Italian girls. **Tom** will be meeting her in July and Alex will give him the tour of Barcelona. Then they will go on to **Madrid** (where Robin's sister's family lives), **Athens** (where Tom has as long-time friend), the **Greek** islands, and then back to Barcelona.



Nodie and Dennis Murphy cutting the anniversary cake made by their daughter Sarah Sennour. Everyone enjoyed the special coffee hour!



Our Austin church family has suffered another loss. **Isabel Cole** had attended services with us for several years. She was known by all for her wonderful hats and her intelligent and inquiring mind. She had recently been to the church retreat at **Slumber Falls**. She was at church on Sunday the 25th for Nodie and

Dennis's renewal of vows for their 50th anniversary. Tragically she suffered a severe seizure on the 26th and died. Her parents **Roland and Elsa Cole** are members of **United UCC on Parmer Lane**. Many of our church members attended her memorial service at United on **Saturday, June 28th**, and many helped with the reception that followed in their church hall (Thank you, Jaime, for organizing it). Her family and friends attended our service on the 29th where she was also remembered. Her folks brought one of Isabel's signature hats, which was put in a place of honor on the table in front of the pulpit.

There have been several special celebrations at church recently. **Nodie and Dennis Murphy** renewed their wedding vows at church on **Sunday, May 25th**. Daughter **Sarah** and her children were there (her husband **Larbi** was traveling on business) and son **Seth** also was present. Son **Ned** and his wife **Faye** could not come all the way from upstate NY, but sent their good wishes.

3 Congratulations to **Harrison Tucker** who received his new Bible from the Deacons on behalf of the congrega-

Brazos Association News
July/August
by Liz Nash

As many of you know, the **South Texas Association** has approached the **Brazos Association** requesting that we consider a merger of our two associations. Our Brazos executive board discussed this possibility in depth at our June meeting. We have decided to host a forum in late September or early October (we are confirming the date and place at this point) for members of our churches to bring questions and have discussion before a more formal discussion at our fall Association meeting on **October 25th** at **United Christian**. We are asking that each Brazos Association church send at least one member, and we are encouraging our churches to send more, especially those who participate in the Association or who have questions/suggestions. Time, date, and place will be sent to our churches and pastors as soon as we have set these. The consensus of our Brazos executive board was that we want to be open to this possible merger with an extravagant welcome, while also knowing that there are a number of details to be worked out, including process, how to meet considering distances, budget, constitution, dues, ect.— if both Associations decide to move toward merger. South Texas is also continuing to discuss and consider the merger. Let's pray and be open to God's abiding Spirit as we discern together what our relationship will be.

It is with joy that I share news from **St. Peter's Church of Coupland**. They have called **Martin Garrison** to be their new pastor beginning **August 1st**. Martin, a member in discernment (in care) at Congregational Church of Austin, was approved for ordination at his Ecclesiastical Council during our spring Association meeting. As I write, he is working to set his ordination date. We will be sending an invitation to all of our Association churches for this celebration as the Brazos Association prepares to ordain and welcome a pastor one who has come to ordained ministry among us.

Last but certainly not least, a profound "Thank You" goes to many of you who came together and worked hard to make our **South Central Conference Annual Meeting** the successful, uplifting event that it was. Particular thanks goes to our chair, **Linda Coats**, who has spent so much time and done so much caring work over the past year. And thanks to many, many of you who made it happen so beautifully. Now, let's heed the call to find more and more ways to care for God's beloved creation, going forward with the theme we shared with such inspiring leadership. For those of you who want to share them, **Jim Antal's** Keynote Address notes and **Tom VandeStadt's** sermon

are posted at [www.sccucc.org/Resources and Downloads.html](http://www.sccucc.org/Resources%20and%20Downloads.html).) It's on to New Orleans, always a delight to visit, next year!

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Brazos Association Minister



The **Theresa Balmer** memorial window is at the rear left as you enter the church. Go to [http://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/cca_history/Congregational Church of Austin History/Theresa Balmer Window.html](http://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/cca_history/Congregational_Church_of_Austin_History/Theresa_Balmer_Window.html) and find out about who she was and how the window came to be.

On Sunday, May 25th our Sunday School children presented a colorful poster with an original poem to the CCA congregation as part of our ongoing "Mission moment." This May mission moment highlighted our commitment to the **Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program** through the UCC's Our Church's Wider Mission program (OCWM). We donate \$600 a year through our fair trade coffee sales to a needy child at the **Rawdat El-Zuhur School** in East Jerusalem. With our donation the Rawdat school provides a nursery school education for an adorable six year-old girl named **Lubna Mousa Ahmad**. Lubna has one older brother and her father is a laborer. Our Sunday School children reached out to Lubna and her family with their creativity and will mail their poem to her at the Rawdat school. Thank you all for your generous spirit which reaches across the globe into the Holy Land! (See photo on page 7)

We are wanting to send you LOVE,
you are like a peaceful dove.

We hope this brings you JOY
just like a shiny new toy.

And we know God loves you,
just as we love you, too!



Sarah Darter presented Harrison Tucker with his Bible on behalf of the church

too. Celebrating their 20th anniversary three days later on the 18th were **Paula (Briggs)** and **Michael Fracasso**. **Dave** and **Sara Ross** noted that they celebrated their 55th anniversary on **June 14th**.

The men's and women's book clubs met at the **Briggs'** home in **Lago Vista** for **Poetry on the Lake** on June 7th. It was good to get together again as the meeting was canceled last year because Fran had her heart attack early the morning the group was to gather. Fourteen poetry lovers (short a few who were at the **South Central Conference** annual meeting) made their way out to Lago Vista and enjoyed reading poetry and enjoying lunch together. Of the fourteen in attendance, seven read their own poems. You can read a number of the poems which were read by going to http://www.patandmeloakes.com/CC_of_Austin_Mens_Book_Club/Poetry_at_the_Lake.html

tion. Harrison has just finished third grade at **Forest Creek Elementary**.

Fran and Rambie Briggs celebrated their **51st** wedding anniversary at church on **June 15th**. They were married **June 15, 1963**, in **Marlin, Texas**, Fran's hometown. Their planned 50th celebration last year was canceled as Fran had a heart attack and open heart surgery in early June which put a real damper on any wild celebrating! This year she is in great shape and Rambie is doing better,



Fran and Rambie Briggs hosted Poetry on the Lake at their Lago Vista home. (l to r) Fran and Rambie, Jeff and Stelli Munnis, and Bill Briggs.

Liz and Reuel Nash celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary on May 17th (actual anniversary on May 19) with a party. Daughters **Ellie, Annie, and Becky** did a great deal of the work to put it on. (It was their idea for the party). They had family and long-time friends here. **Ellie** is off to **China** for six weeks with her boyfriend, **Louis Rodgers**, staying with his aunt's family in **Henan Province** as a home base. They are leaving from **Montreal**, where Louis is from. When they come back, she will move to **Montreal** to start a master's program in sustainable development at the **University of Montreal**. An extra challenge will be that the school is French speaking, a good proficiency for development work. **Annie** and her boyfriend, **Sooner**, are headed to his home in **Vermont**, taking a sabbatical from their current home in **Boulder**. Reuel and Liz will see where they decide to live and work next: **Boulder** or elsewhere. **Becky** is working in Austin at **SNAP Kitchen** in various locations this summer. She will



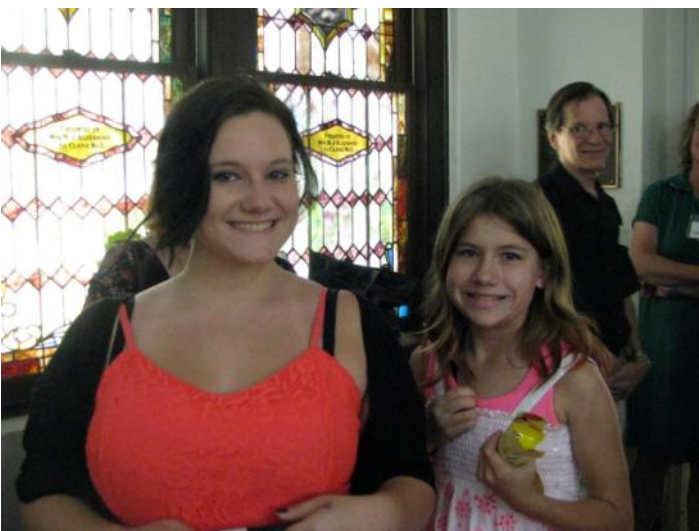
Michael, Giovanni, Stella Fracasso, Rambie and Fran Briggs and Paula Briggs Fracasso celebrated the Briggs' 51st wedding anniversary on June 15th.



Peripatetic traveler Ellie Nash talks with Pastor Tom about her upcoming travels to China over the summer.

go to **Global College**, a part of **Long Island University**, in late August, for the first of three semesters studying abroad. Next fall, she will be in a program that studies cultures through the lens of religion, going to **Turkey, India, and Thailand**. They will all meet in **Mt. Washington, Massachusetts** at the end of July for their treasured yearly sojourn with their extended family there.

Congratulations are also in order for **Emily Howicz** who graduated from **Cedar Ridge High School** on **May 31st**. She has several options as to where she will be next year, so we look forward to learning more soon. She was honored at coffee hour on **June 15th**.



New high school graduate Emily Howicz was honored at coffee hour. Her proud sister Tess is on the right—with Steve Domingue and Gail Christeson looking on.

Beth Gleason was also honored at coffee hour on **June 8th** for her graduation from **Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary**.



Beth Gleason cutting her graduation cake Looking on are War-rinda Harris, Peter Jacobs, Gail Christeson, Alden Harris, Megan Goff, and Harrison Tucker.



St. Peter's Church of Coupland, U.C.C., voted unanimously (with two abstentions) to call **Martin Garrison** to be their new pastor. **Martin** was excited to accept the call

and officially begins his role as pastor on **August 1st**. He's already found a couple of excuses to go out and meet with the people of St. Peter's, and to sit in what will be his new office. St. Peter's is about the same size as our church, but located in a more rural setting. It's the only church in a town of about a thousand people, 30 miles northeast of Austin. Several of the families trace their roots back to the founders of the church and still maintain family farms in the area. Martin says, "I'm a little trepidatious. Despite the wonderful training as an intern at Congregational, I'm suddenly aware of how varied the responsibilities of pastor will be, and that I haven't made a good plan for all of them. I do feel comfortable about children's time though." **Martin and Emily** will be moving to **Coupland**, and living in the parsonage across the street from the church. Emily is going to commit to commuting back to Austin for at least a year and see if she can adjust to it. Hopefully, if she doesn't like the commute, she'll find new work in **Elgin, Taylor**, or northeast **Round Rock**. Both Martin and Emily will miss the Congregational Church and all of its wonderful people. And needless to say, all of us will miss them both.



Anna Kimberley presented a poem written by the Sunday School students for our Palestinian student.

Sunday School teacher **Anna Kimberley** helped the Sunday School children to write a poem which has been sent to our new student at the **Rawdat El-Zuhur School in Jerusalem**. Her name is **Lubna Mause Ahmed** and she is about six years old. The Sunday School is thinking of more ways to connect with and support her. (Read the poem on page 4). Anna's last Sunday with us will be **July 27th** as she will be heading for Galveston to pursue a master's degree in occupational therapy.

Lucy Hanouille reports that **Bill and Betty Phillips** are making good progress, although it will be a while before they make it back to church. Bill's ankle fusion was successful and he is now back to swimming and can walk with a boot. Betty is working hard on physical therapy on her right arm and shoulder and is making good improvement. Bill reported that **Douglas Anders**, our conference minis-

ter, notified him that the fifty-fifth anniversary of his ordination in the Christian ministry would be honored, along with other ministers, on **June 7th**, at the annual meeting of the **South Central Conference**. Bill's ordination took place at the **First Baptist Church at Hamilton, New York** (the founding church of Colgate University). They had five academic department heads present, and the front row of the chapel was filled with **Mennonites**, who were on a work project in Hamilton. Bill's father, mother and uncle (all ordained ministers) participated in the laying on of hands. His sister sang a solo. **William Hamilton** (then professor of New Testament theology at **Colgate Rochester Divinity School**) was the ordination speaker. Bill's brother, **Dr. John A. Phillips** (author of *Christ For us in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Eve: History of an Idea*) was ordained with him.



Clara Jordan Matthews, Whit and Betty Bodman's first grandchild.

Betty Bodman has already visited their first grandchild **Clara** and her parents **Elizabeth and Greg Matthews** several times, but **Whit** finally made her acquaintance in mid-June when they were in New Jersey. Not surprisingly, they think she is just perfect!

The congregation had a special treat on the 15th also as former trio violinist **Andy Streitlemeier** was in town and joined us for the service. Andy joined the trio in the last half of the service and treated us all to some quartet music. We love to catch up with you, Andy--and we love the music!!

Pat and Mel Oakes enjoyed a visit on **June 6th** with Carol Barrett who was in town for her grandson **Kai Austin Barrett's** second birthday and also to see new grandson **Drake William**. Kai and Drake are the sons of Craig and Delan Barrett who make their home in the Zilker neighborhood not far from Pat and Mel's. Carol and Pat knew each other growing up in Miami at Plymouth Congregational Church years ago—although Pat is ten years older! Carol was very active in this church for many years until she moved to California in 2007. She has been with the city of Burbank

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for September Visitor — August 21st



The trio became a quartet with the visit of Andy Streitlemeier (l to r) Amy Harris, Andy, Jonathan Geer, and Colin Ferguson.

for the past 1/2 years and is the assistant director of the department of community development. Husband Gary is still based here, but they see each other often as Gary is back and forth to China on business often (Touch Technology--touch screen manufacturing). Craig is working here in Austin for an internet start-up company (Spare Foot) in marketing and Delan works with software for Whole Foods. Son **Whitney** is working in **Basel, Switzerland**, for Roche and is the international manager for herceptin, a cancer drug.

Paul Deisler writes from Corpus Christi as follows. "I am finally as well recovered from my aneurism operation of a year ago as I am likely to be and can be more active now. So far this year, I have made four trips: to Austin (a weekend, when I was able to come to the CCA on the Sunday), to Houston (to speak at the memorial service for a

longtime friend, **Dick Mullineaux**, known to some CCA members), to **Odessa** (for the memorial service for my last remaining aunt, my mother's youngest sister) and one long trip to three cities, **Ft. Worth, Lubbock** and **Santa Fe**, all trips with the invaluable help of my older daughter and co-traveler, **Jane Deisler-Seno**. Air travel to Odessa in a wheel chair proved to be so easy that we did most of the third trip by air, traveling by car from Lubbock to Santa Fe (overnight in Santa Rosa, New Mexico) to get me used to the large change in elevation. In Ft. Worth we attended the beautiful graduation ceremony (in biology) of Jane's daughter (my granddaughter), Ellie Seno, from TCU (a real thrill); in Lubbock we visited my Texas A&M roommate and his wife, two very long-standing friends; and in **Santa Fe** we visited younger daughter Julie Deisler. We didn't see much of her until a weekend for she is very busy as head of the Department of English, Speech, Writing and World Languages at Santa Fe Community College. We did get to drive up **Mt. Tesuque** (nearly 11,000 ft.) together, me with some of Walgreen's compressed oxygen canisters (50 breaths, each) in hand. Jane and I toured a bit on our own, too, Santa Fe being a wonderful place for that. Altogether it was a very fine, three-city trip with much good visiting and eating. Having lost 70 pounds in the last two years or so, the eating posed no problems. I have also undertaken to give a few lectures on cosmology (strictly as a well-read aficionado) at my retirement community and am as active as I can be at the **Unitarian-Universalist Church of Corpus Christi**. *Buildings and Grounds* is beyond my powers, but I attend services and belong to two different discussion groups. I can still talk! The congregation is small and most friendly. I remain grateful to the four surgeons who, with their hard work and great skills saved my life over a year ago. Life remains fun. No hospitals this year, so far. Fingers crossed".