

THE VISITOR

December 2012

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

Rev. John Towery, Pastor Emeritus

OPEN-DOOR DINNER A TIME-HONORED TRADITION



As we have for a number of years, nearly enough to say "because we've always done it that way," we'll be celebrating Jesus' birth this Christmas with our Annual Open Door Dinner. This is a tremendously fun and joyous event that begins at 12:00 noon on Christmas Day with a brief celebration of Holy Communion. After worship, around 12:30, we open our doors and anyone who wants to join us for a full-course sit down meal is invited to do so. The first year we served Christmas dinner, several of us drove around downtown Austin on Christmas morning to round up some hungry folks, and by mid-afternoon we fed around 25 people. Last year, we had well over one hundred people lined up and ready to eat when we opened our doors. As dictated by tradition,

our Christmas Kitchen Coordinator will be presented with a ceremonial Santa hat. Folks who've enjoyed that honor in the past include John Moore, Cecile Adam, Joe McMillan, and Tommie Pinkard.

If you can help out, here's a rundown of what we'll need for Christmas day:

- Christmas Spirit: the desire to offer the gift of love and service to other people.
- Kitchen Coordinator: to wear the Santa hat, and to be the one everyone points to when someone new shows up and asks, "who's in charge?" Basically, the Kitchen Coordinator makes sure the pre-cooked hams get in the oven on time so they're served hot, and that all the other food brought in for the day is heated and served.
- Kitchen and Dining Room Help: folks to heat up food in the kitchen, set tables, serve food, sit with the guests and enjoy a great meal, and then clean up afterwards. You can come for the whole event or just one hour or so. We start getting ready around 9:00 am and we're typically done sometime between 3:00 and 3:30 pm.
- Food Preparation: folks who can prepare food in advance, and then drop it off at church prior to the meal (that morning or a day or two before). Food can include potluck fare like vegetables, turkey or ham, stuffing, salads, breads, and desserts.

If you can help in any of these ways, please let me know by telling me on a Sunday morning, or sending me an e-mail at revtomv@swbell.net. Thanks!



Christmas Candlelight Service And Christmas Party

This year, our Christmas Candlelight Service will be held on **Sunday, December 16**, at 7:00 pm. This service of readings and carols culminates with the lighting of our Christ candles to illuminate a darkened sanctuary as we sing *Silent Night*.

Afterward, we're all invited to the home of **Pat and Mel Oakes** for their annual church Christmas Party, featuring the world-famous queso and spirit-infused eggnog with whipped cream.



Folks who don't live in Austin any more will be astonished at the new construction going on around the church.



Delighted grandmothers—Barbara Burnham (l) and Enid Ross © enjoyed being with their granddaughter, Samantha Rosson, and Samantha's mother Julia Ross on Nov. 24, 2012. Samantha's father Robin Rosson, one of CCA's former church cellists, was home sick with a cold.

Micah 6 Staff Changes

Please join Micah 6 of Austin in showing appreciation to outgoing Pantry Director **Linda Williams** for three years of service to Micah 6. A reception will be held in Linda's honor on **Saturday, December 8th**, from **12:00 PM to 2:00 PM** in the Great Hall of **University Presbyterian Church**, 2203 San Antonio Street. At the same time, meet the new pantry director, Joe Bell. Joe is a member of University Baptist Church and has lots of experience in the food business. He has been training with Linda Williams in November and will take over the helm December 1st. Welcome, Joe! Refreshments will be served.

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

Following directions was important for **Don Miles** during his Halloween week visit to Florida. His son Richard and his daughter-in-law Phoebe (who have been guests in our choir a couple of times) took him to a nature preserve near the **University of Florida**. The sign at the entrance said: "Do not try to pass an alligator if it is in the middle of the trail." Yes, there were about twenty 12-foot alligators napping along the banks of the stream, about 15-20 feet to one side of the trail.



Look carefully in the background and you will see the aforementioned alligators with Don Miles.

Pastor Tom VandeStadt and his wife Robin Chapman and daughter Alex were counting their blessings this Thanksgiving. In early November Robin had a bike crash while riding her bike to work. Fortunately she was wearing her helmet (which was pretty well bashed in)—a real lifesaver. She banged her face up pretty badly, but, besides some scarring, she has healed well.

Musician **Michael Fracasso** (and **Fran and Rambie's** son-in-law) was involved in a serious auto accident while on tour in Michigan but came out of it, thankfully, with only a broken finger on his left hand. His car's airbags deployed which saved him from more serious injury. The day before

Thanksgiving the splint was removed. Now he has only a bandage and hopes to be playing guitar again in a few weeks. The Briggs and Fracasso families are especially grateful this Thanksgiving for all being together at the lake (and for apple pie). Michael's cookbook will be coming out soon. More word on that next month.

Dennis and Nodie Murphy missed church on November 11 because they were attending their niece's wedding in **Richmond, Virginia**. The bride is the daughter of one of Nodie's sisters, so they enjoyed a mini-family reunion. Nodie helped her brother **Tom** bake 23 pies for the reception. The Murphys also spent some time in Arlington, Virginia, with other family members. Nodie's sister-in-law works for the **National Chamber of Commerce** in D.C. and she took them to the top of the building to enjoy an incredible view of the White House. It was exciting to be in Washington just after the election and to hear some inside stories on how the issue of immigration was getting some attention.

Savanna Tucker lucked out at church the Sunday before Thanksgiving. **Pat Oakes** was doing her annual Pilgrim impersonation in honor of her ancestors **Priscilla (Mullins)** and **John Alden** and all of the other Pilgrims who formed the original Congregational churches in this country. After church Savanna approached Pat and asked if she could borrow her costume for a social studies pres-



Harrison Tucker, closing his eyes to make a wish for his birthday.

entation at school the following Tuesday. Her mom **Pam** reported, "Savanna was a great success at the Pilgrim market at her school. Her brother **Harrison** was a good customer. She was a dairy farmer and made butter and buns for sale. (Savanna is in 5th grade and Harrison is in 2nd.)

She sold out and was able to take her proceeds to purchase other goods from other vendors. Harrison had a birthday in mid-November and had a family celebration and a kid-party. He and his friends played laser tag (twice) and went rock climbing, then had pizza and brownie pops (like cake pops.) Sav's birthday was the 23rd."



Harrison Tucker was one of his sister Savanna's best customers at the Pilgrim Market at school.

Not only were **Dave and Sara Ross** pleased that their son **Michael** joined them from Florida for Thanksgiving as well as son **Andy** and his wife **Leslie Poer**, but Nodie was also most pleased to have another deep voice in the choir. In fact, while there were many regulars in the congregation missing, there was a bumper crop of singers on the 25th — 15 folks in the choir! **Lucy Hanouille** was back after an absence of about month after lending her voice to another church choir.



There was no question on the Sunday after Thanksgiving that it was the last Sunday in **Pentecost** and that Advent was approaching. **Jaime Hadley** (photo at left) is very good about making sure the altar paraments (liturgical hangings) are ready for each season.

Whit and Betty Bodman had a wonderful Thanksgiving with out-of-town family coming to Austin-- their daughter **Elizabeth Bodman** and her husband **Greg Matthews** and their son **Noah** and his wife **Erin**. They were joined by Betty's mom **Florence**, so there were seven around the table. All were feeling especially thankful that Whit is doing so well after his recent bypass surgery.

Christy Kuhner had a great Thanksgiving holiday also. The weekend prior to Thanksgiving she flew to Indianapolis for the family reception of her youngest son **Cameron Wardle**, who married **Katie Locke** last January. Her two other sons were also there—**Jeremy**, the eldest, and **Zachary**, the middle son. Jeremy flew back to Austin for his first visit here and also to see his grandfather, who lives in Georgetown. Christy noted that daughter-in-law **Katie** and her three sons prepared all of the delicious food for the reception for 100 folks. A real treat was having a friend of Cameron's who is a brewer create a special beer that was served at the reception—named **War-Locke**—a combination of the bride and groom's names. **Jeremy** was enjoying getting to know Austin a bit—and was delighted to see **Whit Bodman**, who served as interim pastor in the Original Congregational Church in Wrentham, Massachusetts, where Jeremy attended as a boy. Jeremy was surprised to learn that **Pat Oakes'** grandparents were also members of that church and that a second cousin of Pat's was his Sunday school teacher when he was a bit younger! He headed back to Boston and North Attleborough later that afternoon.



On Nov. 25, Whit Bodman was happy to see Christy Kuhner's son Jeremy Wardle whom he knew in Wrentham, Massachusetts.

Talley Summerlin reports that the **Freese/Summerlin** family was well cared for by the **Drew University** community and surrounding townships in the aftermath of **Superstorm Sandy**. They were evacuated from campus for a few days for safety reasons, but were back in their campus apartment by the Thursday right after the storm. They fared FAR better than many, even right there in North Central NJ. At Thanksgiving time they still had friends

Brazos Association News

December

by Liz Nash

I have two “good news” items to share. At our recent Brazos Association Executive Board meeting, we decided to sponsor an association-wide work camp at **Back Bay Mission** next year. We also decided to provide \$1000 toward travel for women who attend the next **UCC Southern Regional Women's Conference**. Both initiatives were discussed at our Fall Association Meeting and the response was so favorable that the board decided to go ahead with each.

We currently are in the process of reserving the week of **December 1-7, 2013** at **Back Bay Mission**. It is still tentative, but I hope we can “pin down” the dates with a deposit by the end of this November. We will be reserving enough spaces to accommodate 20-30 people from this Association. Back Bay has a long and excellent history with work camp trips, now with a greatly expanded mission of providing housing in the area following the devastation of **Hurricane Katrina**. They attract groups from all over the United States and are full months in advance: a testament to the life-giving work they do and the life-giving spirit there. The cost will be \$125 per person for materials and a place to stay. Food and transportation will be extra. Back Bay is a one day drive from our area, making transportation costs quite affordable. As we make more firm plans, we will share those with you.

The **UCC Southern Regional Women's Conference** will be held at the **Cerveny Conference Center at Camp Weed in Live Oak, Florida, October 18-20, 2013**. Live Oak is in the northern part of Florida, just east of the Florida panhandle. We hope to have a group that drives together, making the travel costs affordable with the funding we will supply. As many of our women who have attended in the past know, these conferences are marvelous opportunities for ministry, faithful spiritual growth, and being in community with other UCC women. Again, as we know more about the plans, we will share them with you.

Season for Caring

iACT is proud to announce that one of the refugee families served in the **iACT for Refugees School** will be profiled in the Austin American-Statesman's "**Season for Caring**" campaign! As a result, we are seeking volunteers to handle the expected flood of donations that typically come-in during one of these campaigns. We will need people to help pick up donations from the home of the giver and either drop off at the recipient's home or at iACT's office. There will be training on **Saturday, December 1 at 10:00 a.m. and Tuesday, December 4 at Noon**. There will be an appreciation party on **January 16, 2013** for all volunteers.

This past month, our **Church and Ministry Committee** accepted **Caleb White** as an in care/in discernment student and began the process of granting ministerial standing to **Rev. Dr. Van Herd**. Caleb is a member of **Friends Congregational Church** attending **Brite Divinity School** in Fort Worth. He has worked on church staffs and has been active in several areas of outreach on his journey to ministry. We are delighted to welcome and support him. Van Herd moved to the Austin area from UCC church ministry in the **Kansas-Oklahoma Conference** and has a Ph.D. in the History of Science from the **University of Oklahoma**. He teaches at the **University of Texas** and at **Seminary of the Southwest** in Austin, with a long term interest in the connections between religion and science. In addition to being a pastor, he is also a church musician and currently serves as the minister of music at **St. Martin's Episcopal Church** in Copperas Cove. We welcome Van and look forward to sharing his many gifts and interests.

Finally, our prayers and blessings go with **John and Linda Boydston** as John retires from his ministry on the last Sunday of November at the **Lyons Evangelical and Friedens Gay Hill UCC** churches. John and Linda have moved to their new home in the Sun City community in Georgetown. The churches had a joyous celebration of thanksgiving for his 7 ½ years of ministry among them on Sunday, November 18th. I am personally grateful to John for his faithful and devoted ministry, and his always uplifting presence, and for his gift of good humor and good stories among his colleagues here.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Brazos Association Minister

AGE Equipment Drive

The **Outreach Board** is sponsoring an **equipment drive** to benefit **Austin Groups for the Elderly (AGE)** in honor of Dr. Matt Blackstock. AGE requests the following items: shower chairs, transport wheelchairs, standard wheelchairs, rollator walker cane (single tip & quad), tub transfer products, incontinence items (all types, even if the package is open). Please keep the equipment drive in mind as you hear folks mention they are not sure what to do with a piece of equipment mentioned above. This equipment can be very useful to other people in the community, and folks who have it can easily donate it. If you have pieces to donate, please bring them to church and let **AGE** transport it to someone in need. If you have any questions, please contact Ranae Beeker at ranaebeeker@yahoo.com

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Return Service Requested

Deadline for January Visitor — Dec. 21

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Central New Jersey. At Thanksgiving they still had friends without power. Talley's commute to NYC remained sketchy as the rail lines were still out due to tree and water damage, so that is the last hurdle that he faces along with hundreds of thousands of others. They are all on a program called the "Emergency Shuttle Service" that gets them into the city on a fleet of buses. They have no idea when everything will be up and running, so it's been very chaotic. The girls and **Elizabeth** were out of school for a week.

Rich (interim pastor of our church several times) and **Jane Thompson** write Christmas greetings from **Ft. Collins**. "Of all our photos from 2012 to catch the meaning of the season, it would be this one from **Robben Island**, off the coast of Cape Town. There **Nelson Mandela** had been kept prisoner for seventeen years in a cell which he could traverse in three paces. But later he wrote, 'As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.' Our trip to **South Africa**, then, served not only as reunion with the family there, but also as an occasion to recall such magnanimity of spirit so needed throughout the world. In addition, it has been in reaching out to homeless families with children which defined Rich's most rewarding community activity this year. His support has been offered through the newly formed **Faith Family Hospitality** program, whereby ten congregations rotate weekly to house four families, who otherwise find 'no room in the inn.' **Jane** continued her third year in volunteering with **Homelessness Prevention** Initiative that

helps stressed families stay in their homes. Otherwise, we were active politically in this election year to address root causes of and systemic remedies for such need. So in this season we are especially mindful of children - of our own, of our children's children and of the massive number of children at risk. It is well also to remember what Nelson Mandela said, 'There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.' "



Jane & Rich Thompson on Robben Island, South Africa.

The saga continues in the no-story-too-small category. **Kathy Strong** reports, "My life continues to be dominated by my never-ending quest to be free of dirty dishes."