

THE VISITOR

February 2018

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt

BE THE CHURCH
Protect the environment. Care for the poor.
Forgive often. Reject racism.
Fight for the powerless.
Share earthly and spiritual resources.
Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.

In May of last year, Rex Tillerson gave a speech to the State Department outlining his overarching view of Donald Trump's America First policy. Tillerson began by making a distinction between America's policies and America's values. "I think it is really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values...freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated—those are our values," Tillerson said, "not our policies." According to America First, when it comes to relating to other nations and people, our policy is to pursue only what's best for us.

I understand Tillerson's distinction between policies and values. From one perspective, it's a helpful one. But from another perspective, it's a false dichotomy. Saying our policy is to place our interests first is just another way of saying our policy is to place our highest value on our interests. From that perspective, there's no distinction between policies and values. Our policy is to value our interests before all else, above all else.

What are America's interests according to the America First policy? From Donald Trump's perspective, what should America value before all else, above all else? I picked up on some of these values in his State of the Union speech. Donald Trump often reduces reality to a few primary concerns: putting himself first, making money, and defending himself against the people he deems dangerous, especially those who threaten his ability to make money. These concerns have for years dominated his very public personal and professional life. In his speech, he promoted these as America's top concerns: putting ourselves first so we can make money and defend ourselves against the people we publically identify as dangerous. That's the explicit Trump policy. Before all else, above all else, America First. Between us and them, it's always us first. Between me and you, it always me first.

This contradicts what Jesus taught about humility.

Humility. You before me. The first shall be last. Give up your spot in line to someone else and go to the back of the line. Keep doing this till the line is done, till you're the very last one.

Humility. You above me. Serve the least of these. Don't climb up the ladder of status and success, climb down the ladder to serve those below you, and keep climbing down till you become servant of all.

Humility. That's what's most valued in God's realm, in God's way of living. Go the extra mile and carry the extra weight for someone else. Give your coat to someone else, and your shirt too. Take the lowest seat. Sacrifice what you have and who you are for others. These are the marks of true greatness in God's realm, in God's way of living.

What this calls for is pretty intense, when you really think about it and really do it. When you live like this in your personal life, when you relate to other people like this in your daily encounters, it has a profound impact on your life. It changes your life. And it changes other people's lives.

It also has a profound impact on the political, economic, social, and cultural realms of life. It's revolutionary. With this teaching, Jesus deconstructs all hierarchies of dominance, from the most obvious and egregious to those that are more subtle and hidden. Jesus subverts every hierarchy of dominance in which people

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habitually, attitudinally, and institutionally place themselves before others or above others. Jesus flips the world upside down in the same manner his mother, Mary, flipped the world upside when she sang before his birth: "God has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

How literally do we take this teaching? I take it literally. But for me the question is, when it comes to putting others before me and stepping down the ladder to serve those below me, how often can I do it and how far down can I go?

Always and all the way are the ultimate goal. Clearly, I've not achieved the ultimate goal. So I need to challenge myself to do it more often and to go further down. This is part of our daily discipleship practice: to remind ourselves every day, numerous times a day, to put others first and to go down the ladder to serve. And to remember, that's how we make our lives truly great, both individually and collectively.

Tom

From Sara Darter

On January 22 I will be with the Heart of Texas Association clergy for a meet and greet. My Southern California/Nevada UCC credentials are officially being transferred here as a retired clergy. I have worked as a hospice chaplain for over a year now for Hope and Grace Hospice. It is run by a woman from Nigeria who has been nursing in the US for over 25 years. The medical doctor on our team refers to her as "The Nigerian Mother Teresa." She is a faith filled Catholic and I love to be around her. I work, perhaps, 15 hours a month for them. I also work days and weekends as a CNA. I have been with a client since August 2017 and he is actively dying, probably this week. As a 95 year old man--it is a relief and release for him. He is someone I have come to love. It's also a release for me and means I will be looking for another primary client. Referrals are appreciated.

I work more and more for people who have taken out health insurance for extended illness and require their worker to have a CNA credential, which I have just renewed after my first two years. And, strangely, a Seton Hospital CPE program secretary called me and asked if I wanted my application for CPE residency to be re-submitted for fall of 2018. I said yes. Two years ago I couldn't pass the requirements for national chaplain credentials because I didn't "sound clinical" enough for some of my committee members. More CPE was recommended. More training as a CPE resident is an opportunity I would love to have. Not many program directors are desirous of having a 68 year old person in their CPE program. However, some like to have "one senior token type for the good of the group." I will apply. It's in God's hands. My prayers always for the work and persons of our church and the Movements world wide to bring justice and peace and hope.

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Don Brown
Deacons Chair	Betty Bodman
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Bryan Rutherford
Christian Education	Lynne Lemley
Youth Sunday School	
Coordinator	John Burlinson
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmistresses:	Shannon Quisenberry, Sara Ross
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News

February

by Liz Nash

Our Association is the host for the Annual Meeting of the South Central Conference this coming June 1-2 at beautiful Camp Allen, the Episcopal conference center and camp which is between Navasota and Hempstead. The theme will be “Gospel Bound,” and the gathering will focus on living out the four South Central Conference priorities: spiritual renewal, living the Gospel according to Jesus, planting new congregations and revitalizing others, and raising the money necessary for our work together. We have a very active planning committee doing the work on the gathering, headed by Linda Coats of Friends Congregational Church, College Station. Several churches are represented on the committee, but we would love to have more. Our next planning committee meeting is at 11 am, Wednesday, February 21st at St. Peter’s UCC in Coupland (bring a sack lunch). We also want to have all of our churches involved in some way -- so please watch for opportunities and needs as we make those known. Plan to come to what promises to be a great opportunity for worship, community, giving, and having a voice at the SCC Annual Meeting.

We have clergy members who we are welcoming and who are preparing to retire. Jerry Carpenter, a vital member of this Association’s ministry and pastor of Weimar UCC, announced his retirement at the Weimar UCC Annual Meeting in January. Jerry will retire as of the end of April, and move with his wife, Doris, to the house they own in Tyler. Sarah Darter has been accepted into ministerial standing with the Association by the Committee on Ministry. Sarah is transferring in from the Southern California/Nevada Conference. She has lived in Austin for the past few years, and is a member of the Congregational Church of Austin. Sarah has been a local church pastor and comes to us with substantial chaplaincy experience. She currently works as a hospice chaplain. Tom Neilsen is now the interim minister at St. Paul’s UCC in Corpus Christi. Tom is a retired UCC minister living in the San Antonio area. He has pastored churches in the Chicago area, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Pennsylvania, as well as having years long involvement in mission work and social justice/solidarity presence in Chiapas and El Salvador. I have known Tom and his wife, Joan, for many years through our travel together to El Salvador.

We learned recently of the death of one of our retired ministers, Rev. Dr. Ted Holland, in early November. Ted had lived for many years in Fredericksburg. He had served as an administrator at St. Edwards University in Austin and Incarnate Word College in San Antonio, and had been an ordained UCC minister for 63 years. He was an accomplished violinist and a man of many gifts. Our prayers go with his family, and we give thanks for his rich life, now complete in Christ.

As many of you also know, an inspiring celebration of the life of Emma Lou Bizer, was held in December at Faith UCC, New Braunfels. Emma Lou, wife of Faith’s Pastor Emeritus Ray Bizer, dreamed of being ordained when before women were ordained in the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Instead, she earned a degree in Christian Education from Eden Theological Seminary, and served the church, the seminary, the MHMR community, and the wider church in many, many ways, as well as doing work among the poor and for civil rights advocacy. We celebrate her life along with Faith Church and her family. Our prayers go with them as they release her to God’s eternal love.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash
Association Minister

Personals
by Pat Oakes

Sunday, December 31, was **Vic Appel** Day at the church. Sisters **Cheryl** (visiting from Wisconsin) and **Debbie** and **Debbie's** family (visiting from New York) hosted a reception honor-



Vic and Betty Appel seated, Sam and Emii Knowlton, Jaime Hadley as guest detective for their murder mystery game, Bob Knowlton, sisters Cheryl Appel and Debbie Appel Knowlton.

ing **Vic's** life and contributions to the church, which **Vic** enjoyed very much. Among those who spoke were **Dave Ross**, **Dennis Murphy**, **Barbara Burn-**



Cheryl Appel, Sam Knowlton, Vic Appel, and Emily Knowlton at coffee hour on Vic Appel Day .

ham, **Betty Appel** and **Tom VandeStadt**. **Nodie** wrote new words to "For the Beauty of the Earth." **Debbie** notes, "The song touched and warmed our hearts as the entire congregation jubilantly sang the lyrics, written just for Dad, to him (in person!) at coffee hour. "Afterward, some of the congregation gath-



Appropriately, several homeless folks dropped in on the rededication of the Appel room and they were warmly welcomed by Emily Knowlton, Cheryl Appel and Vic and Betty Appel

ered downstairs to rededicate the Appel room in honor of **Vic** and his late wife **Jean**. It was perhaps appropriate to **Vic's** and our ministry that three homeless men came in to partake of the food and joined us downstairs. **Debbie** welcomed them graciously. **Dave Ross** noted that both **Mike** and **Andy Ross** were present, and that they grew up together with **Cheryl** and **Debbie** in the church. This was the first time in many years that the four were here at the same time. There was a lot of catching up to do! Earlier that week on Christmas Day, the **Appels** dressed up in Santa ensembles and visited some handicapped folks and, on the 29th, **Jaime Hadley** helped out as guest detective in a murder mystery night game at **Vic** and **Betty's** apartment in their assisted living facility. **Vic** had a bad fall in September and is slowly making a good recovery.

Joe McMillan had two memorial services, one on Saturday, January 13, at the King-Seabrook Chapel on the campus of Huston-Tillotson University and another on Sunday, January 21st, at our church. Twelve of us (13 including **Tom**) went to pay our respects on the 13th—**Dave** and **Sara Ross**, **Robin Chapman**, **Nodie Murphy** (former HT board member) **Reuel** and **Liz Nash**, **Martin** and **Emily Garrison**, **Mel** and **Pat Oakes**, **Betty Bodman**, and **Warinda Harris**. Before the service, **Joe's** fraternity brothers in Alpha Phi Alpha, Delta Chapter, sang and spoke about **Joe**. The formal service featured wonderful music by the HT concert choir and many speakers who told of their memories of **Joe**, dear

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

friends, public officials, and clergy. The service was led by HT Chaplain **Don Brewington** and Rev. **Tom Vandestadt**. City Council member **Ora Houston**



Pastor Tom Vandestadt delivering Joe McMillan's eulogy--Huston Tillotson concert choir in the background and Rev. Frank Dietz back right--Joe McMillan gave Tom the vestments he is wearing



Alden, Warinda, and William Harris with grandmother/mom Barbara Johnson on the Sunday Barbara walked with her walker to receive communion--a special miracle!

read a proclamation about **Joe** in which the city declared January 13th, 2018, as **Dr. Joseph Turner McMillan, Jr.** Day in Austin. You can see the memorial service program, the proclamation, and other information on Joe by going to the church history Web site <http://server16.websitehostserver.net/~patandme/CCAHistory/JosephTurnerMcMillan.html>. **Joe's** second service required real dedication to get there—through the detours because of the 3M Half Marathon. In spite of those hazards, there was a good turnout. The choir performed special music and longtime members of the congregation shared heartfelt stories about **Joe** which helped folks who missed knowing him understand why so many of us loved him and appreciated his many talents. **Joe's** good friend **Wardell Willis** (with his wife **Brenda** and son **Caleb**) told a great story about how Joe came to be **Wardell's** best man almost 22 years ago when he and **Brenda** married.

The first communion Sunday of the new year was on January 7th.—and it was a memorable one. What made it so memorable was seeing the amazing, inspiring **Barbara Johnson** (mom of Warinda and grandmother to **Alden** and **William**). **Barbara** had a serious stroke more than 2 years ago and she has worked tirelessly to make her way back—physical therapy for swallowing, eating, talking, walking, becoming more

independent, etc. She was finally well enough to leave the rehab hospital several months ago and came home to be with the Harris family who have missed her so. She has been working even harder at home with physical therapists. Starting out the New Year, **Barbara** decided that she would come to church that day—and that she would use her walker—not her wheelchair—so she could walk up the aisle for communion. With **Warinda** by her side, **Barbara** walked up to the communion table and back—there was not a dry eye in the congregation.

The church is welcoming a new office manager—**Donna Cravens**. She started work a day later than intended because of our sleet and ice storm on the 16th (a total of about 1/4 inch, but Austin was



Donna Cravens, CCA's new office manager is already hard at work!

stopped in its tracks). Our former office manager (Emerita) **Kathy Whatley** has been showing **Donna** the ropes. **Donna** was born in Kentucky but has lived all over the world as her dad was in the military. Later she also traveled the world in her capacity as a sales representative for Amersham Corporation which dealt with radioactive materials for medical usage and process order instrumentation. Her late husband also traveled all over the world in his job as an engineer. She loves to read and enjoys walking, especially with her adorable miniature poodles—sisters named Diamond and Sandy. **Donna's** hours are 10-2, which works well as she commutes from San Marcos. Come by or call and say hello to **Donna** and introduce yourself. Many thanks to **Lynne Lemley** who filled in so graciously for several months.

Longtime member **Tommie Pinkard** sends her greetings and good wishes for the New Year from Brevard, NC. She reports that her son **David** and six-year-old granddaughter **Daphne** (visiting from New York City), a first grader, flew down to see her in mid-January. They had a great four days. They saw some different waterfalls in the area that involved long hikes on gravel paths, picked out a new iPhone, for **Tommie** visited the playground **Daphne** likes (where they almost froze). And best of all, they played her favorite 20 questions game (opera characters). They left early in the morning just before snow invaded the east coast.

Congratulations to our fabulous church pianist/composer **Jonathan Geer** who recently won an HMMA (Hollywood Music in Media Award). It came as total surprise to him! **Jonathan** says, "It's a huge awards show with pretty much all the big name film

composers and everybody, so it's kind of wild to be nominated for something and then to actually win. The category I won is "Song/Score - Mobile Video Game" for my score to "The Franz Kafka Videogame." You can listen to the music online here - <https://jonathangeer.bandcamp.com/album/the-franz-kafka-videogame-ost>

Jim Howicz reports that he walked most of the way in the recent 3M Half Marathon and finished in just over three hours, which unfortunately, he says, is not much slower than his running time. His sister, **Ann Howicz**, was visiting from Chicago. They had a great weekend together. Making it more special, Jen and **Ann** met **Jim** at the finish line-- something that does not normally happen. **Jim** was treated to a feast of breakfast tacos and then they all went to see **Emily** and her boyfriend **Chance**. Good work, **Jim!**



3M Half Marathon finisher Jim Howicz with his sister Ann Howicz visiting from Chicago



Jonathan Greer with his most recent award, an HMMA (Hollywood Music in Media Awards)

Don Miles' Thanksgiving trip to Ft. Benning was to be with his grandson, **Austin Ritzman**, and his wife, **Abby**, and to meet his first great-grandson **Joshua** who was born November 1st. **Don's** daughter, **Juliette**, and her husband, **Marlin**, were there from Anchorage, Alaska, where they are both working with the FBI. So were **Juliette's** in-laws, **Mrs. & Mrs. Marlin Ritzman**, and **Marlin's** sister **Natalie**, all from

Missouri., **Austin** has completed two tours in Afghanistan. He and his wife and their new son will be moving to Ft. Riley, Kansas, shortly. **Juliette** and **Marlin's** other son, **Garrett**, has just completed a tour of duty in Iraq. He and his wife, **Tiffanie**, are expecting a daughter in February, so that will give **Don** another great-grandchild. They're in Louisiana, now, but will be moving to Ft. Benning, GA, shortly. **Don's** third grandson, **Christian Miles**, is also on active military duty. He's on a submarine based in Guam, and probably somewhere off the coast of South Korea. He's the one **Don** mentioned to the church last year who had hiked the entire Appalachian Trail from Springer Mt. in Georgia to Mt. Katahdin in Maine. **Don's** Christmas trip was a drive to and from Washington, D.C., to see his son, **Richard**, and his wife, **Phoebe**. It was four "hotel nights" in each direction, arriving on the fifth day, or a total of ten days behind the wheel. Don is not sure if he'll still be able to do that next year, but he is not deciding yet. On the weekend of March 9-11, **Richard** and **Phoebe** will be holding the grand opening of their new museum near the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. It's the Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention, named after **Phoebe's** father, the late **Dr. Robert Cade**, who invented Gatorade. They have spent more than a decade planning and raising millions of dollars, so this will be a big event in their lives. **Don** hopes to be able to travel there, but specific plans have not "jelled" yet. **Don** was a journalism professor at U. of F. and News Director for the university's radio stations in the late 1970's. **Richard** and **Phoebe** met in high school while he and his late wife were living there. In addition to all his travels, **Don** missed the first two Sundays in January at church due to weather on the 7th and a serious cold with breathing problems on the 14th. We've missed you—especially the choir—**Don**, so welcome home and stay well!

The **Murphys** had a "complicated" Christmas. They were blessed by a visit from their son **Ned**, his wife **Faye**, and grandson **James**, down from the Twin Cities area. Together with son **Seth**, they opened presents on the 25th. Then they were all joined by daughter **Sarah** and her family (including **Randy** and his bride, **Carie**) for the day after Christmas—and opened presents again! Sadly, that day **Nodie** received news that her **Uncle Ash** had died on Christmas Eve at the age of 99 and a half years. **Nodie** and **Dennis** went up to Conway Springs, Kansas, to celebrate his life on January 6th in the small town where he had spent his entire life. It was wonderful to visit with extended family



Dennis Murphy reading to his grandson James Murphy when James and his parents, Ned and Faye came to visit for Christmas.

there, but challenging to think of **Ash's** wife **Zelda** pursuing her life without him after 75 years of marriage. **Nodie** and **Dennis** are so glad they were able to visit **Ash** and **Zelda** this past summer.

Chester Rosson had an unfortunate run-in with a leaking water faucet on his porch in early January. The water made the porch slippery and when he went to try to turn the water off, he slipped and on his way down knocked over a ladder which clobbered his head and his knee cap. Bleeding rather badly from the head wound, he tried to call doctors in his town of Crockett and that is when he found out that no one there could help him (late afternoon), that there is no emergency room or hospital in Crockett any more, and that he was going to have to drive himself (!) to the emergency room at the hospital in Palestine, Texas, about 40 miles away. He made it, was stitched up (head) and braced (knee). It was good to see **Chester** at church on the 21st where **Chester** reported that his knee was doing fine and that the stitches were gone and that his forehead was looking good!

Pat and **Mel Oakes** had a small world story to share with the congregation on Jan. 28th. **Pat** had put a memorial service date on her calendar weeks before, the service to be held in memory of the husband of a good friend on the 27th at the Umlauf Sculpture Garden. Then she received an e-mail from **Rich** (who served our church for several months each as interim pastor in 1995 and 2001) and **Jane Thompson** wondering if they were going to be around on Saturday the 27th and could they pick them up at noon at the Umlauf and feed them lunch and then take them after lunch to a home in Tarrytown. Puzzled, **Pat** checked her calendar and then wrote to the Thompsons asking if they were going to a memorial service at 10 a.m. Indeed, they were—**Rich** who retired as pastor from Central Presbyterian and knew the family there—was serving as the officiant at the ser-



Jane and Rich Thompson visiting from Ft. Collins, Colorado.

vice. After the beautiful service, the **Oakeses** and the **Thompsons** adjourned to the nearby **Oakes** home where they had lunch and a wonderful visit. **Rich** and **Jane**, who are still enjoying retirement in Ft. Collins, Colorado, send their best wishes to the congregation with a special hello to those who were around while **Rich** was serving as interim.

Marilyn Gaddis and **George Carruthers** flew to California to honor her late husband's brother-in-law on his 90th birthday! Family members came from across the country for the January 12th - 15th "gathering" at the Welk Resort near Escondido, California. After the celebration, **Marilyn** and **George** spent time on the campuses of Pomona College and Claremont Graduate University, **Marilyn's** alma maters in Claremont, California. **Marilyn's** niece then

met them and took them out to Jurupa Valley, near Riverside, for a visit with **Marilyn's** sister, **Nancy Sage**, whom they had not seen for several years. They had nice weather for their trip and they missed the Texas "Deep Freeze!"

Mel and **Pat Oakes** had wonderful, meaningful trip to San Francisco and environs over the New



Emily, 17, and Ethan Buck, almost 15, grandparents Pat and Mel Oakes, and Durham Oakes Deifell, 5 1/2, on the campus of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

Year holiday. It was a "three-fer" of a trip. They got to see their daughter **Mardie** and grandson **Durham** as they live there. They were able to see daughter **Beth** with **Eugene**, **Emily**, and **Ethan** who had come west from Iowa City to attend the memorial service of **Eugene's** remarkable mother **Rose Buck**. The service was held at Skyline Community Church, UCC, in Oakland where Eugene and his three siblings were raised by their mother following the untimely death of their father. For **Mel** and **Pat**, it was a joy to be able to spend time with both their immediate family and the many members of **Eugene's** family who were in town. **Pat** and **Mel**, **Beth's** family, and **Mardie** and **Durham** had a spectacular day touring the Stanford campus in Palo Alto where **Eugene**, class of 1987, served as an expert tour guide. For **Pat** and **Mel**, along with the joy of touring with their children and grandchildren, the most amazing thing was that **Pat** walked (with a cane and holding **Mel's** hand) for three and a half miles that day! Just a few weeks later, **Beth** surprised her parents by coming to Austin for four days to perform with the Austin Chamber Music Center.

History Corner

It is hard to believe that the Towery Education Wing will be 50 years old in 2019. Perhaps it is a bit early to start planning a celebration, but it is not too early to start thinking about it.

If you would like to learn more about the history of the church, go to <http://server16.websitehostserver.net/~patandme/CCAHistory/index.html>--then go to the Guide To Site to see what your options are.



Aug. 1968 Construction beginning on the new education wing--Van Courtright Walton, an early, long-time member of the church, is the man standing on the left by the machinery. Does anyone recognize the man on the right of Van—or the couple on the right in the picture?



1969 The church in the snow with the education wing under construction

More voter information Primary Elections March 6

Early voting begins Tuesday, February 20th and ends Friday, March 2nd.

Texas ranks 46th in the nation in voter turnout. (Hawaii is worst –no polls on the beach?) This means that every vote is all the more significant, especially in the primaries. In the 2016 May primaries, statewide, 1.95% of the voting age population voted. Of registered voters (25% of eligible voters don't register to vote), the percentage is 2.64%.

In Travis County, in the May, 2017, primaries (both parties) only 6.26% of registered voters cast a ballot. Some elections are decided by only a few votes, even 1 vote. Margin of victory is a significant political statistic. It is not just winning or losing.

For current, local election information, go to:
<https://www.votetravis.com/vexpress/display.do>

This will allow you to:

- Find out what your precinct is
- See a sample ballot for both Republican and Democratic primaries
- See the list of voting locations and times
- Confirm ID requirements

Best sources of information

The League of Women Voters has a website that gives information on every candidate on your ballot. Enter your address and the full list will appear from national to local races. Go to <http://www.vote411.org/ballot>

This includes links to candidate websites. This is an excellent resource.
League of Women Voters (non-partisan) Voter Guide will be available later at:
<https://lwvaustin.org/voter-guide/>

Local news:

For Austin Chronicle voter information (with helpful links to other information), see <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2017-12-15/2018-primary-election-filing-time/>

They will probably list their endorsements (with explanations) later.

For the Austin American Statesman, see:
<http://www.statesman.com/news/elections/>

They are also likely to post endorsements later.



March Visitor Deadline— February 22, 2018