

THE VISITOR

April 2018

The Congregational Church of Austin **United Church of Christ**

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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 1967, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. set out to dramatically transform the American civil rights movement from a “reform movement” to an “era of revolution” that would confront the structural and systemic causes of poverty in America. Speaking at a Southern Christian Leadership retreat in May of that year, Dr. King proclaimed, “we must recognize that we can’t solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power...the whole structure of American

life must be changed.”

Dr. King recognized that poverty is a form of violence. “There is a kind of strangulation in the air,” he said. “In our society it is murder, psychologically, to deprive a man of a job or an income. You are in essence saying to that man that he has no right to exist. You are in a real way depriving him of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, denying him in this case of the very creed of his society. Now, millions of people are being strangled in this way.”

In his effort to redistribute economic and political power, Dr. King announced in 1967 his plan to organize poor people from across the nation to march on Washington DC, and to coordinate this march with a series of actions around the country. He called it the Poor People’s Campaign—a multi-racial, multi-ethnic movement that would boldly challenge and transform the power structure that kept people poor. Dr. King said of this movement: “Power for poor people will really mean having the ability, the togetherness, the assertiveness, and the aggressiveness to make the power structure of this nation say yes when they may be desirous to say no. And it is my hope that we will get together, and be together, and really stand up to gain power for poor people—Black people, Mexican-Americans, American-Indians, Puerto Ricans, Appalachian Whites, all working together to solve the problem of poverty.”

On April 4, 1968, less than one month before the Poor People’s Campaign was set to launch, James Earl Ray killed Dr. King in Memphis, Tennessee. Three weeks later, with the leaders of the Poor People’s Campaign mourning the loss of Dr. King and struggling to coordinate their efforts without his leadership, nine caravans of poor people from across the country converged in Washington DC. In the nation’s capital, they constructed a tent encampment named Resurrection City on the National Mall and housed over 3,000 people for six weeks. During the day, they protested on the steps of various government agencies and in the offices of elected officials. In the evening, they had educational events, cross-cultural exchanges, and music.

But Dr. King’s vision of using the march on the nation’s capital as a springboard for mass civil disobedience around the country, in conjunction with nationwide boycotts to create a political and economic crisis that would force Congress to take action, didn’t materialize. The Campaign’s racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse leadership hadn’t worked together long enough to develop their long-term strategies and their short-term tactics. The campaign also provoked a strong backlash. Many liberal white individuals and institutions that previously supported the civil rights movement condemned the Poor People’s Campaign, and the white-dominated media was highly critical of it. Some African-American civil rights leaders refused to support it. The FBI used media disinformation and other tactics to discredit, disrupt, and immobilize the campaign.

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The 1968 Poor People's Campaign ended too quickly and it fell far short of its goals. Today, fifty years later, we still live within that political-economic structure that Dr. King sought to radically transform. In our nation today, the top 5% own 72% of the wealth and the bottom 80% own 7%, while 97 million Americans are designated low-income and 1 out of every 5 children lives in poverty. Our political-economic structure is still deeply racist and sexist. For the last 50 years, the unemployment rate has been 50% higher for African Americans than it has been for white people. Women, especially women of color, are disproportionately poor. There are 5 million more women than men living in poverty, and two million more women than men living in deep poverty. To paraphrase Dr. King, that's what happens when the bottom 80% are not organized enough, or powerful enough, to make the top 5% say yes to justice.

Today, there's a renewed effort to lift up Dr. King's dream of radically redistributing economic and political power by organizing a new Poor People's Campaign. All around our country today, there are numerous local efforts seeking to address particular injustices related to poverty. The goal of the New Poor People's Campaign is to bring these diverse local efforts together into a powerful movement that's both broad-based and diverse, one that both supports the local efforts and is national in scope as well.

The United Church of Christ publically supports the new Poor People's Campaign, and it encourages local UCC churches to support the campaign in whatever way they're able to do so. The Poor People's Campaign is now organizing in Austin. The campaign supports everything that we as a church value and support in our justice pronouncements and ministry. I'm hoping that we as a church will take a sincere interest in the Campaign, that we'll explore how we can support it, and that we'll do so in whatever way we can.

Tom

May Visitor Deadline—April 27, 2018

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Keith Beresheim
Deacons Chair	Betty Bodman
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Bryan Rutherford
Christian Education	Lynne Lemley
	Darcy Beresheim
Youth Sunday School	
Coordinator	
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News

March

by Liz Nash

Our spring Heart of Texas Association Meeting will be held on **Saturday, April 21st at Weimar UCC. The meeting will begin with worship at 11 am** (with registration starting at 10:30am). The plan is to eat an early lunch and then have a business meeting and program focused on putting together hygiene kits for Back Bay Mission. We will also learn more about the current work of the Mission -- in particular, their programs to help people become self sustaining and their welcome to all in need. Our “kit-making” isn’t meant to take the place of what our churches are doing for the South Central Conference Annual Meeting. Instead, we encourage everyone to bring supplies (listed below) for the hygiene kits that we will assemble together at the meeting for an extra-generous donation from Heart of Texas. We will use whatever supplies our church representatives bring, then use the meeting offering and match it as needed from Association funds to complete the kits that are assembled. The kits include new 16” x 28” (inch) hand towels, washcloths, wide tooth combs, toothbrushes, tubes of toothpaste, bars of bath-sized soap in wrappers, plastic soap containers, solid or roll-on deodorant, plastic disposable razors, spray insect repellent, travel-sized bottles of hand sanitizer, and one gallon resealable plastic bags. Bring what you can get a good deal on or what people from your church would like to buy and donate. We will do this kit-making “potluck,” see how it works, and have fun putting them together.

This spring meeting is being hosted by the Brazos Valley group of churches within the Association, with several churches helping. We do want all of you to know that Weimar is currently undergoing a major kitchen and fellowship hall remodel. They anticipate being ready for the meeting, but if that does not happen, Friends Congregational Church in College Station is ready to be the back-up meeting place.

Plan to come to Weimar. We will let our churches know as soon as possible if we have to change locations.

Also, we hope you will plan to come and also to help out as we host the South Central Conference Annual Meeting on June 1st—2nd at beautiful Camp Allen near Navasota. Our Association planning committee has been working for several months to put together a meeting with a “Gospel Bound” theme that will celebrate Conference Minister **Don Longbottom’s** installation and explore in more depth the gospel-inspired vision and goals of the Conference. Registration information should be on the South Central Conference website as you read this. We will be letting our churches know at our spring Association meeting how everyone can help.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ at Redeemer UCC in Zuehl are preparing for the coming retirement of their pastor, **Lee Zillman**, who announced his retirement at the congregation’s Annual Meeting at the end of January. **Lee** does not have a date set yet for the end of his ministry at Redeemer, but the church is beginning their preparations for that major change as they go into an interim period. Our prayers go with Redeemer and with **Lee**. We also celebrate the Redeemer Edge youth group and all of the youth groups who worked on giving projects for the Souper Bowl of Caring. On February 4th, The Edge youth led in worship, showing a video about the Souper Bowl of Caring, and then provided a wonderful lunch for the church. They raised about \$600 for the Christian Cupboard food bank in Seguin. Terrific!

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals

by Pat Oakes

Whit Bodman reports, "Confirmation class is off and running, with five members and **Katie Lemley** as Assistant Professor. On Sunday, the 4th of March, we examined the whole Bible, following the story and the genres. We hung up two clotheslines and put various books, persons, and quotes in a rough order, such that we had the Old Testament from creation to the return from exile on one side, then a gap, then the New Testament from the Gospels to the apocalypse on the other side. Next time we will go on to the history of the church and its struggles with theology, geography, and power. Throughout we pay attention to the content of the baptism service and the confirmation service, to know what our parents and the church promised on our behalf, and what we might promise through the confirmation of baptismal vows. Participation in the confirmation class does not presume confirmation at the end. Its purpose is to give an overview of the tradition in its essence and diversity so that each confirm and can make his or her own informed decision. We will meet weekly at 9:30 am before church, through the spring until Memorial Day. If you are wondering where the remnants of donuts come from during Fellowship Hour, it is part of our reward for getting to church on time. What a great group to work with: **Harrison Tucker, Savannah Tucker, Alden Harris, Tess Howicz, and Isabella Dietz!** I am honored to learn with them."



Early Sunday morning confirmation class taught by Whit Bodman--l-r--Alden Harris, Tess Howicz, Isabella Dietz, Katie Lemley, Harrison and Savannah Tucker

Our fabulous pianist **Jonathan Geer** and our wonderful addition to the choir, **Roberto Hernandez**, have happy news to share. **Roberto** and **Jonathan** got married this past March 2nd. The ceremony was held at the church and the reception was at the Barr Mansion. They decorated both the church and the Barr Mansion main ballroom with 3,000 paper cranes that they started folding a long time ago. **Jonathan** has been into origami since he was a kid, so it was something he wanted to do to make things personal/unique. **Rev. Jo Jensen** officiated at the ceremony, which was mostly in Spanish. All of **Roberto's** immediate family was able to come from Monterrey! And **Jonathan's** mom and older brother **Peter** were there, along with his wife and their three kids. **Jonathan's** niece, **Kamryn** sang an Ave Maria that he wrote especially for the ceremony and she was accompanied by a classical guitar trio. **Jonathan** and **Roberto's** friend, **Lex Land** also sang a lovely version of Gracias a La Vida.



The sanctuary decorated with 100's of folded paper birds for the wedding of Jonathan Geer and Robert Hernandez which was on March 2nd

For the reception at the Barr Mansion they had a cocktail hour and then a dinner in the main ballroom. They had a three course meal with music in between each of the courses. Jonathan composed four pieces of music that were based on Pablo Neruda love sonnets (he will have a recording of them soon). The music was performed by **Amy Harris, Tony Rogers, James Anderson, Phil Spencer** and vocalist **Tynan Davis**. **Roberto** surprised **Jonathan** with a mariachi band performance at the end of dinner. **Jonathan** honestly had no idea it was coming and it was a wonderful surprise! Then there was a short time for cake-cutting and dancing afterwards.

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Sparklers were lit by the guests for their exit and they hoped that everything would get taken down and put away by 1 a.m. **Jonathan** says, "It was a crazy, emotional and unforgettable day and it took so much work and planning... but it was so worth it in the end. Our mantra leading up to the big day was always 'Well.... you only get married once!!' ". They both say it really was one of the best/most amazing days of their lives. And the honeymoon was wonderful! Neither of them had ever been to Hawaii so it seemed like a no-brainer. They spent about four days there and then a couple of days in San Francisco on the way back to Austin. They were on Oahu and didn't do any island-hopping since they were only there for a short time. They did a lot of remote nature hikes and Jonathan took way too many pictures (over 1,600!!!).



Newlyweds Matthew Mueller and Jan Rodewald, the son and new daughter-in-law of Joan and Bill Mueller



Roberto Hernandez and Jonathan Geer on their honeymoon in Hawaii

Bill and Joan Mueller are very happy to announce the marriage of their son **Matthew Mueller** to **Bonnie Rodewald** which took place on Saturday, March 3rd, in Long Beach, California. The wedding was a surprise for the guests who arrived at their engagement party. The sign as they entered informed all that the wedding would happen at that party with friends and family members already there. **Bill and Joan's** two other children, **Elizabeth Mueller** and **Karambir Singh Khalsa**, were also in attendance. It was a beautiful weekend of celebrating.

Don and his friend, **Dora Cruz**, were present in Gainesville, Florida, March 2nd and 3rd, for the family pre-opening of the new Cade Museum of Innovation and Creativity near the University of Florida where **Don** was a professor in the 1970's. The museum is named in honor of **Dr. Robert Cade** the father of **Don's** daughter-in-law and the inventor of Gatorade. **Don's** son **Richard** and his wife **Phoebe** sat in as guests in our choir a couple of times a few years ago. Grand opening ceremonies for the general public will be on May 18th-19th.

In January **Whit Bodman** led a seminary travel seminar to Israel/Palestine. They did the usual tour of biblical - sites around the Sea of Galilee, down the Jordan River to the likely site of the baptism of **Jesus**, and up to Jerusalem. **Whit's** favorite place is the Mount of Temptation, a monastery set high in a cliffside overlooking Jericho and the Dead Sea. There are still monks there, hidden in their cells which carved into the craggy hills of the wilderness. There were 17 folks in all. Half were students and the others were spouses, alumni and a couple of friends. One high point was spending time at a yeshiva, a seminary for Jewish students, doing some formal study and a lot of socializing and comparing notes both about the two traditions and about the seminary experience.

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Whit loves wandering around the old city of Jerusalem, revisiting the Holy Sepulcher, the Temple Mount, the Crusader Church of Saint Anne and a host of other nooks and crannies that have become familiar over the years. Whit thinks this is his 14th or 15th trip since 1982, and he hopes it is not his last. He was not teaching in February and March, so he was catching up on all kinds of projects that had been awaiting attention and were mostly overdue.

Keep **Andy Dierksen** in your prayers as he recuperates from a motorcycle accident on March 19th. Riding safely with helmet and gloves, he went appropriately around a corner on a familiar street and hit some sand causing his bike to flip out from under him. Fortunately he was right in front of a house being worked on and two workmen were there to help him. After calling **Faye** to let her know what had happened, they took **Andy** to Dell Seton's emergency room where he was found to have four broken ribs, a lot of road rash, and a minor concussion. His wife **Faye** says that there was lots of blood, too—and that Dell Seton was wonderful. **Andy**, who runs his own handyman business, will be out of commission for a month which is not good, but everyone is so grateful that his injuries were not more severe. Both **Faye** and **Andy** are also grateful that **Whit** and **Betty Bodman** helped them retrieve his motorcycle and bring it back home.

It was wonderful to see **Jen Howicz** in the congregation on Palm Sunday. She is getting a clinical doctorate in physical therapy at University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. She does much of the class time via Skype, with onsite weeks three to four times a semester. She started her first rotation on the 26th of March down at Reeves Rehab at University Health System in San Antonio, working in inpatient pediatrics. After the rotation she will be halfway done! A bonus for all is that she will be home on weekends with no assignments or papers to work on—so we should see her in church for the next month.

Mel and Pat Oakes enjoyed a visit from their daughter **Mardie** and their almost 6-year-old grandson **Durham** in between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday when they flew to Austin from San Francisco for Durham's spring break. Activities for the 6 days included playing and picnicking at Zilker Park, going to the Science Center there; swimming, raking leaves with Grampa, enjoying the Thinkery, and listening to Grampa tell his wonderful stories. Also enlivening the week was a 3 day visit from cousin **Jessamy Brown** who took some vacation days to drive down from Fort Worth.



Mel and Pat with Mardie and Durham (5 1/2)
in the bluebonnets at Zilker Park

History Corner

Mel Oakes created this graphic of the history of church names four years ago. We are still called The Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ. **Rev. William B. Mathews** was the pastor of the church when we joined the UCC in 1957. **Rev. John Towery** became the pastor of the church in 1959.

