

THE VISITOR

July/August 2018

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



I recently returned from a week-long silent meditation retreat at Vallecitos Mountain Retreat Center. The retreat center is a 135-acre ranch located in the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico. In 1992, an environmental activist attorney, who's also a Buddhist, bought the ranch and turned it into a Buddhist retreat center with an emphasis on nature and environmental justice.

Unlike the public land in the national forest, this land has never been logged, and it hasn't been grazed by cattle since before World War II, which means it enjoys incredible biological diversity in both plant and animal life.

When you sit in a meadow, you can see, feel, and after it rains, smell many different types of grass, in all different shades of green, blue, and yellow. The grasses attract millions of butterflies, they're all over the place. And thin blue dragonflies, with their translucent rainbow wings. Birds are everywhere, singing non-stop from sun-up to sun-down. The Western Tanager is particularly stunning—bright yellow with a red head and black wings. Late one afternoon, just before dinner, I saw a bobcat come out of the forest and trot quickly across one of the meadows. The oldest Ponderosa Pines in New Mexico, 6 to 8 hundred years old, are on this property.

During the retreat, we meditated together every morning on a hillside meadow overlooking a grove of Aspen, their leaves fluttering like little mirrors. The hillside meadow, and the Aspen grove, was surrounded by thousands of acres of rugged pine forest.

Every afternoon, we hiked into the forest, sometimes as a group, sometimes alone, and found a good place to sit, on soft pine needles or a craggy overlook on a ridge, and we mediated. Then hiked some more. Then sat to meditate again.

One afternoon I climbed a steep ledge. When I got to the top, I followed the ridge as far as I could till it dropped off hundreds of feet into a canyon. At the drop-off, a big outcrop of rocks overlooked the canyon. I sat on the edge of that outcrop for a long time, overlooking the canyon. Four hawks were riding the air currents. Back and forth, back and forth, high above the canyon. Sometimes, they'd drop down into the canyon to a lower elevation than me, and then rise up on a breath of wind to my eye level, soaring in the breeze about 30 feet from me. I'd never been that close to hawks in flight before. Like I said, I sat there a long time.

In the evening, we meditated together again, in a different meadow, until the sky turned pink, orange, and purple. Then I headed to my tent, got into my sleeping bag, and fell sound asleep in the cold night air till the birds woke me before sunrise for another day.

As you might imagine, I felt very relaxed and peaceful there. Physically, emotionally, and psychologically relaxed and peaceful. That's why I go there. I know the effect practicing that practice in that place has on my body, heart, and mind.

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After the retreat I stayed for two nights at the hostel and organic garden commune that I discovered outside of Taos back in April. During the day, I hiked in the mountains, including a hike up my favorite mountain, Wheeler Peak, pictured above. At night, I slept in a little cabin.

I hope you have the opportunity to get some time off this summer, to feel relaxed and peaceful, to take a little break from the world and its tribulations, and to be revitalized in body, heart, and mind.

Tom

Sign Up To Participate In The Vision Task Forces

Please prayerfully consider joining one of our new vision Task Forces. Task Force 1 is Strengthening Our Community, with John Goff serving as the organizer. Task Force 2 is Broadening Our Community and Outreach, with Whit Bodman serving as the organizer. Task Force 3 is Accessibility and Flexibility of our Facilities, with Jim Howicz serving as the organizer. Task Force 4 is Our Future in a Changing Neighborhood, with Bill Beardall serving as the organizer. Talk to the organizers to get a better sense of these four task forces, and sign up on the sign-up sheets in Fellowship Hall

A Great Opportunity To Spend Time With Our Children: Nursery Volunteers

Towards the end of the summer, our Sunday School teacher, Amy Kent, will take a leave of absence to give birth to her child and to enjoy being a new mom. Our Nursery Attendant, Sam Clubb, will fill in for Amy by teaching Sunday School. We therefore need folks to sign up as Nursery Volunteers in August and September. This is a wonderful opportunity to spend time with our church's young children. If this is something you would like to do, please talk to Darcy Beresheim or Shaela Rutherford, or sign up in Fellowship Hall.

September Visitor Deadline—August 27, 2018

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Keith Beresheim
Deacons Chair	Barbara Burnham
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Bryan Rutherford
Christian Education	Lynne Lemley
Coordinators	Shaela Rutherford
Youth Sunday School	Sam Clubb (Acting)
Clerk	Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News August

by Liz Nash

How can you and your church still contribute in a “hands on” way to the Hurricane Harvey recovery? At our South Central Conference Annual Meeting in early June, I learned how we can do that during one of the meeting workshops. The UCC does long term recovery work as a specialty in its disaster recovery work, meaning that we are there for the “long haul” work often needed for several years. Our Harvey volunteer work site is in Port Arthur, an area which has had less access to recovery resources than the Houston area. The UCC church there, Plymouth Congregational UCC, has made available housing for up to 12 volunteers at a time to do work using volunteers of all skill levels. The construction work is overseen and sponsored by the Southeast Texas Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit founded by Plymouth, with substantial continuing involvement from its pastors, Revs. **Matt and Rhonda Hopson**, and church members. **Rev. Joshua Lawrence** and **Amarlee Collins** are the UCC Co-Coordinator of the work. This effort is unusual in that it helps to restore low income rental housing, an enormous need that is not usually funded and addressed by recovery grants. There are many openings for groups to come, and your work will be welcomed and needed. For more information, see http://www.ucc.org/disaster_hurricane_harvey_recovery_port_arthur and http://www.ucc.org/news_volunteers_hosts_at_ucc_s_new_harvey_recovery_site_share_skills_hugs_prayers_03122018.

Although the website indicates volunteer groups come during the week, Joshua has told me they will work with groups that want to come but cannot spend an entire week or perhaps need to work on the weekend. I encourage you and your church to become involved with this effort that provides ongoing and needed help.

Rev. Ron Trimmer has asked me to spread the word that the New and Renewing Churches Committee of the South Central Conference is providing funds to train, equip, and support our church planters. In order to make funds go further, the committee has developed a shared or covenantal funding formula/request, providing one third of the money for this effort from New and Renewing Church funds, asking the church planter’s Association to provide one third funding, and asking the planter and their congregation to pay one third. **Ron** notes that the amount of funding requested from our Association and/or from a sponsoring church would depend on the request, but would usually be \$200-\$500. The current church planter in our Association is **Ryan Hart** at Open Cathedral in Leander. **Ron** notes that a great way to support Ryan’s work and the church’s work is to send letters of encouragement, and I am sure they would appreciate donations, too! For those who would want to do any of these things, the church’s mailing address is **Ryan Hart, Open Cathedral, 1433 Freer Cove, Leander, TX 78641**. Also, **Ron** adds, “As always, I am available for comments and questions. You can reach me by email at revtrimmer@gmail.com or by cell at 512-876-9097.”

Finally, set aside the date. Our Heart of Texas Association Fall Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, October 20th at 11am at United Christian Church in Austin. The meeting this time is in the Austin Heart of Texas group of churches. We hope many of you will plan to be there.

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

Personals
by Pat Oakes

The Congregational Church of Austin was well-represented at the Austin Interfaith Delegates Assembly on Sunday, June 10th. Among those in attendance were **Joy Penticuff** leading the questioning, **Roberto Hernandez, Jonathan Geer, Beth Placek, Nodie Murphy, Victoria Li, Lynne Lemley, Carolyn Thompson, Kay Pruett, and Ruth Koenig**.



Bill Campbell writes, "In April and May, 2018, **Victoria** and I took a two-week trip to Israel, the West Bank and Jordan. The first 10 days we were on a 'Footsteps of Jesus Tour' organized by a retired Disciples of Christ minister and his wife with a guide and logistical support provided by the Siraj Center of Beit Sahour, West Bank. The tour, which the organizer leads once each year, provided a chance to visit Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank and Christian holy sites in Galilee and Northern Israel. As an alternative to the typical type of Christian Holy Land tour, our tour also included a program of meetings with representatives of Palestinian and Jewish organizations, as well as international organizations, to learn different perspectives on the recent history and present day situation regarding the Israelis and Palestinians. In particular we gained a lot of first hand observation and perspective on the situation in the West Bank. It was a great trip in terms of seeing a lot, doing a lot, and learning a lot. We also did a two-day follow-up trip with another tour group to Jerash and Petra in Jordan. Both of those ancient sites were quite amazing. All in all, they were two

weeks we will always remember. As **Tom** recently talked about, sometimes you have experiences such that you can't see things the same way again—this trip was such an experience." Folks are hoping that **Bill** and **Victoria** will share a slide show of their spectacular trip with the congregation soon. (Photo's cont. next page)



4/29/18 Victoria at the Dome of the Rock, a very holy site to both Muslims and Jews.



5/5/18 Bill Campbell and Victoria Li in a rooftop view of Old Jerusalem with the Dome of the Rock clearly visible, taken from the roof of the Austrian Hospice which provides lodging primarily to people from the countries of the Hapsburg Empire.

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



5/10/18 Bill in front at the right of The Treasury at Petra. The Treasury and other such ruins at Petra are actually tombs of the ancient Nabatean civilization. The Treasury was used as a backdrop in one of the Indiana Jones movies.

The **Tucker** clan was all set to go to Cuchara, CO. for their traditional summer retreat to cooler climes on June 30, but fire changed those plans. The Spring Fire is still burning and is the 3rd largest fire in Colorado history at just over 108,000 acres. Cuchara was evacuated on June 30. The fire started quite far from Cuchara, but each day it came closer and closer. Firefighters (1500 of them) worked very hard to prevent the fire from burning Cuchara and LaVeta, a nearby town. The fire burned 225 structures and the fire map shows they got it stopped at the back door of the cabins on the north side of Cuchara.

Pam does not believe there were any deaths or major injuries. They lifted the evacuation order on Tuesday, July 10. The fire was 87% contained as of July 16. **Pam** feels they are so fortunate. **Alison** drove to Cuchara on July 14 and says all is good in Cuchara. Everyone is so grateful and hugging and welcoming each other. Donations are pouring in to the local fire department and there are lots of signs up thanking the firefighters. **Pam** and **Harrison** were flying out on July 27. **Savanna** is going to Ultimate (frizbee) nationals again in Minnesota.

Stephen Russell and **Scott Neeley** spent a month in Porto, Portugal, while **Stephen** was visiting the University of Porto. **Stephen** presented research about US school policies and programs to support LGBTQ youth ([news coverage here](#), for those who can read Portuguese!), and gave lectures on academic writing and publishing. Before going to Porto they spent several weeks in Rome, where **Stephen** and **Salvatore Ioverno**, a frequent visitor at church, were teaching a study abroad course for UT students. **Stephen**, **Scott**, and **Salvatore** are pictured here with their friend **Laura** at Gay Pride in Rome.



6/9/18 Stephen Russell, Scott Neely, and Salvatore Ioverno with their friend Laura in for a Gay Pride celebration.

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

Andy and Faye Dierksen traveled to Venice Beach, Florida, for the Fourth of July with their friends **Luke, Michelle** and baby **Evelyn Faye Hotz**. It was Michelle's first time on a plane or seeing the ocean which made it an extra special trip. They enjoyed sea food, the beach, fireworks on the pier and good company.



7/7/18 Andy and Faye Dierksen with their friends Luke, Michelle and baby Evelyn Faye Hotz.



7/18 Zooley Parkhill with Nana's dog Izzy in Kansas.

Zooley Parkhill and her grandmother **Debby Kohrt** (otherwise known as Nana) had a wonderful road trip to Wichita, KS, in July, **Nana's** little dog **Izzy** kept **Zooley** entertained during the 8 hour drive. While they were there, they went to the church **Debby's** mom belonged to--Eastminster Heights Presbyterian Church. That Sunday there was a visiting Mennonite choir that sang a cappella—beautiful music. **Zooley** went to their summer Sunday school after the children's sermon and saw a play presented by the high school group from the church. **Zooley** had so much fun that she is ready to go back—how about **Izzy**?



July 2018 Zooley Parkhill right by the pastor for the children's sermon with the Mennonite choir in the background—at her great-grandmother's church in Kansas.

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

Don Miles has planned a ten-day round trip to Winchester - in the NW corner of Virginia - to visit his daughter, **Juliette Ritzman** and her husband, **Marlin**. He'll be making overnight stops in both directions at Jacksonville, TX, Jackson, MS, Chattanooga, TN, and Radford, VA, from August 12 to 22. Among the attractions he plans to visit are Ruby Falls, Lookout Mountain, and a dinner cruise in Chattanooga on the way north, and a night's stay in a restored Pullman car at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Hotel on the return trip. We expect a full report for the next month's Visitor, **Don**.

Mel and Pat Oakes spent 18 wonderful, cool days in San Francisco in June. Thanks to the generosity of good family friends who went to France for more than a month, **Mel and Pat** stayed in their home just a block from Golden Gate Park, keeping an eye on things and watering the house plants. **Pat and Mel** walked almost every day for at least 2 hours. The cool temperatures and the beautiful park made walking (while still a challenge) a pleasure for them both. They were able to see their grandson **Durham** playing at his day camp, explored several museums and the Japanese tea garden there, and took some time to smell the roses—the rose garden was in full bloom. With all that walking and living in a 3 story house, **Pat** got noticeably stronger. Daughter **Mardie** often came for supper and an overnight after she picked up **Durham** from camp. Ask **Mel** about the amazing car retrieval caper of their friends' car from the Oakland airport. **Mel, Pat, Mardie,** and **Durham** took a trip to the Monterey peninsula where they explored the amazing aquarium there, over-nighted at the historic Asilomar Conference Center, drove the stunningly beautiful 17 mile coastal Pebble Beach drive, and then were able to take **Durham** to see a real life falconer (at the moment **Durham** is fascinated by falcons) who took us out to a huge field to learn to help **Mora** the falcon fly—complete with a leather glove to protect **Durham's** arm — feeding her frozen mice—an unforgettable experience. Pat's brother **Robert** came up from LA for her birthday—it was a great celebration at **Mardie's** apartment with several of her

friends and co-workers and their children **Pat** and **Mel's** friends are thinking of traveling again in the spring and have invited the **Oakeses** to come back! They are definitely interested.



6/30/18 6-year-old Durham Oakes Deifell enjoying climbing in a wonderful playground in Golden Gate Park.



6/30/18 Pat, Mel, and Mardie Oakes enjoying cool weather in June at a playground in beautiful Golden Gate Park.

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



7/29/18 Betty Bodman (with package) was wished a fond farewell by all of us as she leaves for New Jersey to help her daughter and son-in-law Elizabeth and Greg Matthews with her grandchildren Clara and Elsie as Elizabeth starts a new job at Fordham University in Manhattan. On behalf of the Deacons, Barbara Burnham and Darcy Grostick presented her with a warm scarf and gloves for use in cooler climes!! Nodie also led the congregation in one of her famous songs—so Betty has now been Nodied. We will miss you, Betty! What is open for dinner invitations!



7/29/18 Nicholas and Hattie Leach, Zoey Parkhill, and Naomi Rutherford with their very expectant Sunday School teacher.

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



7/29/18 Nodie leading the congregation after worship in "We love you, Amy" (think "We love you, Conrad" from "Bye, Bye, Birdie") I-r--Whit Bodman (in red hat), Tom VandeStadt, René Slataper, Sarah Allen, Rachel Dietz, ?, and Amy Kent, our wonderful, very expectant, Sunday school teacher. Amy and her husband are expecting a baby boy in late August.

History Corner

For those of you who are new to the church, the next time you are in the fellowship hall for coffee hour, take a minute to find the church library—now known as the Corliss Gaspari Library. The room used to be the pastor’s office (the room behind the altar/choir area) until the addition of the “new” education wing in 1969. In 1976 the room was refurbished as a part of the church’s bicentennial project. It was redone several years ago. You can enter from the fellowship hall (near the stairwell to the basement) or from the altar area in the sanctuary. **Corliss**, who had been an accountant, joined the church in March of 2001 when she felt the call to become a minister. She was diagnosed with cancer while a seminarian at the Austin Presbyterian Seminary and had hoped to be ordained in December of 2002. To your left as you enter the library you will see a framed photo of **Corliss** surrounded by a beautiful stole—the stole she hoped to wear when she was ordained.

Tom VandeStadt says, "One thing that stands out for me from that time was how powerfully **Paul Deisler** loved and supported **Corliss**. He was a Deacon at the time, and he was pretty assertive in his attempts to bypass the usual system of ordination and to ordain her before she died. It didn't work out, but **Paul** cared so much for her that he gave it a good try. I loved **Corliss**, and I always respected **Paul** for what he did."

Pat Oakes remembers **Corliss’s** kindness vividly as **Corliss** and **Mary Sinclair** came to visit **Pat** while she was in the hospital with her first knee replacement. Sadly, **Corliss** died ten days later at the young age of 51.

