

THE VISITOR

November 2018

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

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Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



Some of us ponder gratitude more deeply throughout the month of November. For what are we grateful? I'm grateful for many things, including living in a place that is peaceful. It sounds odd to say our nation is peaceful. The USA seems anything but peaceful now, as some of our compatriots sow division and discord with hateful words, lies, violent acts.

Yet, I'm grateful jet planes aren't screaming over my head, dropping explosive devices on my city, my neighborhood, bursting eardrums, shaking the ground, throwing building debris and body parts into the air, inflicting survivors with nightmares.

Compared to that scenario, things are peaceful here. And I'm grateful.

I'm grateful I'm not a father watching my daughter starve to death, or fearing she'll be kidnapped or trafficked.

I'm grateful I'm not a refugee fleeing home, crossing borders or seas, looking for a place on earth where I'm less likely to starve, or get raped or murdered.

I'm grateful I don't worry about a home-made bomb exploding outside my synagogue, or mosque, or church, or on my bus, inside my coffee shop, the outdoor market, the gay nightclub.

I'm grateful my nation's economy hasn't tanked, leaving every shelf in every store empty, every pharmacy empty, every gas station empty, the water wells drained, the electricity intermittent, the people living off rodents, boiled bones, wild grasses.

I'm grateful my government isn't more authoritarian, more corrupt, more violent, that it doesn't impose more censorship, cane people in public, "disappear" critics, throw journalists out windows. I'm grateful I don't live in a failed state, where only local strongmen, or gangs, govern.

I'm grateful for the peace I enjoy here in Austin, Texas, USA.

Yet, my gratitude for the peace I enjoy is tempered. I know that many people in this world don't enjoy peace, including many in the USA, Texas, Austin.

I know that in the USA, I could be incarcerated, or shot, if I had black skin. If I were a woman, I could be writing #MeToo. If I were gay or transgender, I could be legally discriminated against, or bullied or murdered. If I were poor, I could be living in one of the sprawling trailer communities in the southwest desert, or in a rust-belt town where all the jobs pay minimum wage with no benefits, no vacation, no sick leave, and drug addiction is the leading cause of death. I could be homeless in Austin. But I'm not, and I'm grateful.

Yet, I can't separate the peace I enjoy from the privileges I enjoy because I'm white, male, middle class, heterosexual, Christian, U.S. citizen. The peace I enjoy is tied to dominance, and to the ways the dominant deny fundamental birth-rights to those they push into subordinate positions. So when I say, I'm grateful for the peace I enjoy, I'm saying, I'm grateful for the privileges that come from the dominance I enjoy.

And that bothers me. Deep within, it bothers me. Kind of sickens me.

(cont. on page 2)

(Cont. from page 1)

Noelle Oxenhandler writes, “If you’re lucky enough to live toward the privileged end of the power spectrum, then you have the luxury of not paying much attention to the devastating weight of circumstances that crushes those at the other end.” How true. And the more I pay attention, the more I realize that my gratitude can’t be divorced from my position at the privileged end of an unjust power spectrum.

In this complex world in which we live, even gratitude is complicated. Gratitude is a spiritual practice, but so is paying attention. And if we pay attention, that for which we’re grateful inexorably leads us into other dimensions of our lives, like privilege, dominance, injustice, complexity, and the feeling of being sickened. Our spirituality embraces all these realities, just as it embraces our experience of earth’s beauty, our love for family and friends, creativity, joy, awe. What a life! I’m grateful our church embraces all these realities in our shared life together, in our spirituality.

Tom

December Visitor Deadline November 26, 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 Coordinators	Lynne Lemley Shaela Rutherford
Youth Sunday School Clerk	Sam Clubb (Acting) Jaime Hadley
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Webmaster	Mel Oakes
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

Heart of Texas Association News November

by Liz Nash

Our Association Fall Meeting was held on Saturday, October 20th. Many thanks to United Christian Church for its welcoming spirit in hosting, to the Austin area churches for helping supply food for lunch, to **Ron Trimmer** for leading the opening worship, and to **Jeremy Albers** for speaking to us in depth about the how the ministry at Slumber Falls Camp changes lives. Congratulations, too, to **Will Nelson** on the vote during his Ecclesiastical Council to affirm him for ordination in the United Church of Christ pending receipt of a call to ministry. At our business meeting, **Bill Burns** educated us about the Christmas Fund offering for support of retired ministers with low pensions and similar needs; **Ron Trimmer** showed us the vision in ministry being lived by the South Central Conference New and Renewing Churches Committee; and **Ryan Hart** gave us an inspiring update about Open Cathedral. We give thanks for our Association leadership, as well as all who came, for a meeting where we experienced uplifting fellowship and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us together.

A great joy from our meeting is the spirit of generosity we shared. Our Association expressed our support of the SCC camping ministry by voting to pay the balance of the funds Slumber Falls needed for payment on the delivery of the new donated mattresses in the final amount of \$387.80, with the Association offering of \$276 going into the Slumber Falls general fund. We also voted to continue the longtime practice of the former Brazos Association and the longtime generosity to youth of the former South Texas Association by putting our youth budget of \$1200 into an ongoing fund to support youth activities such as attendance at the National Youth Event.

In the past month, we have received news of two ministerial transitions. **Eric Dehmer**, currently a Local Pastor in the United Methodist Church, has been called to serve Friedens Church of Washington. We celebrate with the Friedens community and look forward to welcoming **Eric**. We also join with United Christian in saying farewell to friend and for our pastors, valued colleague, **John Gage**. **John** is taking a call to be the Senior Minister at the Congregational Church of Needham, Massachusetts in the Boston area. His last Sunday at United will be on November 18th. **John** has served all of us in a wise and conscientious way on the Committee on Ministry, in the past year as chair. We wish **John** God's blessing in his new ministry. Our prayers are with United as they embark on this time of interim and search.

Finally, **Nikki Stahl**, Associate Pastor at United Christian, has responded to my request at our Fall Meeting for information I can share about how to help with the initial disaster response to the flooding in the Marble Falls area. First Baptist Church Marble Falls is accepting donations and spearheading volunteer clean up/mud out efforts. Their information is here: <https://fbcmf.org/2018-flood-volunteers-donations/>

Blessings in Christ,
Liz Nash, Association Minister

The Congregational Church of Austin had a wonderful turnout for the Austin Interfaith Accountability Session held at University United Methodist Church on Sunday, October 21st, ahead of early voting. Fifteen of our congregation attended, giving our church one of the highest per capita attendances of the 37 organizations that make up Austin Interfaith. Many thanks to all who attended! Because we're willing to act on our commitment to social justice, we're fighting above our weight!

Candidates for Austin mayor, four city council seats, and a state house seat and federal congressional seat accepted Austin Interfaith's invitation to participate in the accountability session. The candidates answered questions about their support (or lack thereof) for the Austin Interfaith agenda of issues: Living wage, workforce training to lift people out of poverty, k-college education, affordable housing in Travis County, programs to address and end homelessness, and community policing.

At Sunday's Accountability Session, as well as in the past, our congregation has actively supported the work of Austin Interfaith, e-mailing the mayor and city council to support a number of important issues, attending Delegates' Assemblies, and participating in small group discussions to identify and prioritize issues that Austin Interfaith should address. Our church hosted a candidates' forum for run-off elections last spring. Our pastor, **Tom VandeStadt**, is a long-time participant in the Austin Interfaith Ministers' Caucus and a tireless supporter of our church's social justice participation.

Our congregation's support contributed to the following funding successes in the 2019 Austin City budget: A living wage increase to \$15/hr for all city employees, contractors, and businesses receiving incentives to move to Austin or expand; \$950K for AISD after school programs that give kids constructive alternatives to street activities, \$1 million for Family Support Specialists at AISD that help families work with schools on behalf of their kids, and \$2.4 million to support long-term job training-specifically Capital IDEA, which lifts people out of poverty into the middle class through completion of 2-year degrees in nursing or computer technologies. All of these programs were facing elimination or severe cuts before Austin Interfaith advocated for them at city hall.

If you're interested in being a part of the work of Austin Interfaith, contact **Whit Bodman**, **Bill Beardall**, **Liz Nash**, or **Joy Penticuff** for more information. "Let justice roll down like waters!"



10/21/18 A pew full of folks from our church at the well-attended Austin Interfaith accountability session I-r Warinda Harris, Whit Bodman, Liz Nash, Andrea Low, Sarah Darter in the pew in front of Liz, Andy and Faye Dierksen, Ruth Koenig, and René Slataper



10/21/18 Dynamo Joy Penticuff (right front in the green dress standing at the mike) addressing the Austin Interfaith accountability session



10/21/18 Part of our contingent at the Austin Interfaith accountability session at University Methodist Church on a sunny Sunday afternoon I-r Andy & Faye Dierksen, Liz Nash, Whit Bodman, Kay Pruett, René Slataper, Sarah Darter, Lynne Lemley, Andrea Low, Warinda Harris, and Ruth Koenig--not shown, Pat and Mel Oakes, Jaime Hadley, and Bill Beardall

Personals by Pat Oakes

The weather has been a problem for several of our members the past month. **Don Miles** reports that he has spent three most enjoyable New Year's Eves in Mexico Beach, Florida. It's right where Hurricane Michael came ashore, and the very next day CNN had a story headlined "Mexico Beach is gone." Mexico Beach is in the Central Time Zone; while nearby Port St. Joe is in the Eastern Zone. On New Year's Eve, they had a fleet of party buses making stops at most of the restaurants and hotels in both towns, so you could celebrate the new year at midnight in Port St. Joe and then hop on a bus to celebrate it an hour later in Mexico Beach. The major restaurants had live bands and ticketed parties where you'd be served champagne to hoist in celebration as twelve o'clock approached. On his most recent visit with **Angel** and **Diane Abitua** from Round Rock, they visited one or two of the more popular places before they settled on one for midnight. **Don** really feels sad for the people who've lost their homes and businesses. He'll have to look elsewhere for future New Year's Eves, but many fond memories of Mexico Beach will live on.



1/18 Don Miles' friends from Round Rock, Diane and Angel Abitur at what was the beautiful harbor in Mexico Beach

Members of the church's Men's Book Club and Women's Book Club have enjoyed annual Poetry on the Lake meetings for a number of June Saturdays at **Fran** and **Rambie Briggs** lovely home in Lago Vista on Lake Travis. We have seen the lake at

various levels over the years, but none of us have seen what **Fran** and **Rambie** saw during the recent devastating floods along the Highland Lakes. They wrote on Oct. 18th, "It is 7pm and the water level is 702.5 ft., and it is just entering our lower level. We still have power, and a place to go if things get much worse. Incredible support from family and friends. This, we will always remember." It got as high as a little over 704 feet (their porch floor is at 712 feet and the power company was going to cut power if it got to 705) and as of this writing a week later, they seem to be holding their own. More rain was forecast as a result of Pacific hurricane Willa, but it seems not to have been as bad as was predicted. They are grateful to their neighbors and friends and cousin **Bill Briggs** for helping them empty the garage.



10/18/18 The view of Lake Travis from Fran and Rambie's garage—the dock is usually behind the tree in the middle

We've had 3 special celebrations this month at coffee hour after church. We celebrated **Cathy Hubbs'** 96th birthday on Sunday, October 7th, with two cakes. It was decided that that is very appropriate for anyone who reached the age of 90 or more! Her daughter **Laura Hubbs-Tait** was in town to lead/organize the festivities. It was great to have **Vic Appel** and **Cheryl Appel** at church that same Sunday. On the 14th we celebrated **Tom** and **Robin's** 30th wedding anniversary (actually several months ago in August). When the Deacons found out, they rightly decided that a cake was in order.

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

Tom made an endearing speech about when they married -- **Robin's** folks asked what they wanted for a wedding present. They decided that the exact right thing was two mountain bikes! **Tom** noted that they have been riding along on their bikes for 30 years now—with only a few bumps in the road!



10/14/18 Robin Chapman and Tom VandeStadt celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary with the congregation a few months late!--also pictured--Cathy Hubbs, Jonathan and Vivienne Zercher, Cheryl and Vic Appel



10/7/18 The amazing Cathy Hubbs at 96 years young with one of her two birthday cakes



10/14/18 Robin Chapman and Tom VandeStadt celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary with the congregation a few months late!

We also celebrated **Bill Mueller's** 90th birthday in great style after church on the 21st. **Bill** and **Joan** were delighted to have several family members in attendance. Daughter **Liz Mueller** and her husband **Michael Oden** both teach at UT in the School of Architecture in the Community and Regional Planning Department. **Matt** and **Bonnie Rodewald Mueller**, the newlyweds, live in Southern California. **Matt** works for WWE traveling and setting up shows throughout the U. S., and **Bonnie** has a new job working for Oracle from her home office. Two close family members were unable to attend the celebration at church. Their older son **Kaprambir Singh Khalsa** is finishing a graduate program at Sofia University in Palo Alto, California. **Luke William Mueller-Oden**, their one grandson, whom many of us remember, is now a sophomore in Washington, D.C., at George Washington University studying politics and economics. (Photo's cont. on next page)

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes



10/21/18 Celebrating Bill Mueller's 90th birthday at church with his family l-r, Matt and Bonnie Rodewald Mueller, Joan and Bill Mueller, and Michael Oden and his wife Elizabeth Mueller



The Mueller's grandson Luke Oden



The Mueller's older son Karimbir Singh Khalsa

A thousand apologies to **Reuel Nash** for not noting sooner that the 2018 church directory (which your correspondent uses frequently) not only contains names, street and e-mail addresses, and phone numbers, but wonderful pictures of our church family which **Reuel** took over a period of months. The photos are at the end of the directory which I had never gotten to until they were mentioned at the women's book club. Check it out if you haven't already done so!

Keep **Beth Placek** in your prayers as she continues to recuperate from a terrible bout with sepsis. She was in the Seton Main ICU for more than 3 weeks and is now recuperating at the Brookdale Spicewood Springs rehab hospital where she is getting a lot of physical therapy and getting stronger. You can send her a card at her home address at 2311 Indian Trail, Austin, Texas 78703. We hope to see her dancing again soon.

Congratulations to **Victoria Li** who has just taken office as the new president of the Austin chapter of the Network of Asian American Organizations. Her installation along with other new officers and directors was celebrated at a banquet on October 6th. Church members attending the banquet to honor **Victoria** included **Bill Beardall, Tom VandeStadt, Joy Penticuff, Bill Campbell, Andrea Low** and **Lynne Lemley**.



10/6/18 Newly installed president of the Network of Asian American Organizations Victoria Li (far right) and the rest of the board

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

Nodie and **Dennis Murphy** have recently returned from a trip to Philadelphia where they witnessed the joyful marriage of their niece. After three days of family reunion and celebration, they remained in Philly to enjoy, yes, a cheesesteak sandwich, and samplings of the wide array of museum offerings in that town. They can particularly recommend the newly opened Museum of the American Revolution, the Barnes Foundation collection of impressionists, and the overwhelming Philadelphia Museum of Art. They could hear the “Rocky” theme as they trudged up the steps!



10/7/18 Nodie and Dennis Murphy had a wonderful trip to Philadelphia recently.

Sara Ross was invited to the wedding of the daughter of a first cousin in Berryville, Maryland, way last summer. After many weeks of mulling over the idea of flying by herself and walking who knows how far to change planes in Houston, she decided to be brave and join the family in a great celebration. She joined sister **Liney** (short for **Caroline**) in Houston and they flew on the same plane to Dulles and rented an SUV. **Liney** drove and **Sara** navigated. This worked out great-- they even made it back to the car rental place at Dulles without getting lost! Unfortunately their brother **Dan's** wife **Cindy** had a heart problem (now resolved) the day before they were to leave Ann Arbor driving with sister **Deborah**, so the three of them didn't make it as everyone had hoped. The bride's family had reserved a lot of rooms (which were all filled) in a nearby hotel, so the entire family and the wedding reception was in one place and they got to see lots of cousins that they had not seen in a

long time. **Sara** and **Liney's** sister **Susan** and her husband **Fred** drove down from Maine so the four of them took a drive in the beautiful and historic countryside before attending the wedding. It was a beautiful wedding of two sweet 30-somethings who were fortunate enough to find each other. It was beautiful sunny weather and they had a great time.



l to r Susan S. Heath, Sara S. Ross and Carolyn S. Speer— three sisters at the wedding

The Equal Justice Center had a great turnout for their annual Peter Pan Golf Tournament on October 4th. There was a good group from the church who enjoyed both the barbecue, a vegetarian option, and the golf—and no rain this year! More photos and a tally of how much was raised in next month's issue.



10/4/18 The Goodgame-Tucker family at the Equal Justice Center's Peter Pan Golf Tournament--l-r--Alison, Pam and Harrison enjoying Franklin's barbecue

(Photos continue on next page)

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes



10/4/18 Enjoying Franklin's barbecue at the recent Equal Justice Center's Peter Pan Golf Tournament were Debbie Kohrt, Joy Penticuff, Jonathan Geer, and pastor Tom VandeStadt

On Saturday, November 17, Tapestry Singers, The Austin Women's Choir will hold their annual Fall concert. This year's theme is "Here on These Branches: Songs of Flight and Fancy." The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. The concert venue is Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, 7050 Village Center Dr, Austin, TX 78731. Tickets are on sale at <https://www.tapestrysingers.org/concert-tickets/> buy now for a 20% discount. **Lucy Erda** is a member of Tapestry and their auditioned group Loose Threads. She hopes to see some friendly faces in the crowd!

George Hetrick managed to convince his boss that 2/3 of a **George** is better than none, and takes every third month as vacation. He's done two short bike tours this year — a week-long trip to Nova Scotia <http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/georgeNS2018>, and a trip on the Great Allegheny Passage <http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/georgeGAP2018>. He's hoping to tour the Texas Hill Country next month. He's still waiting for his long-awaited super-bike to arrive. Perhaps we can convince George to bring it to church for show and tell one Sunday!!

Heather, Zac, and Abi Lytle are pleased to report that baby **Oliver William** was born on May 20th, so he's now already 5 months old! They are all doing relatively well in Yakima, Washington. They are finding it a bit hard to get plugged into the community and to find a church that feels like a good fit, but these problems may be related to the fact that

the majority of their time and energy currently goes into caring for and entertaining a newborn and 3 year old! They've had a few chances to get out and enjoy the beautiful natural areas near Yakima, including Mount Rainier which is only an hour's drive away. They hope they'll be able to get **Oliver** baptized in Austin like his big brother and sister, but may have to wait until the spring to make it to Austin. They send their best to everyone.



Summer 2018 The Lytle family enjoying a hike in the great outdoors near Yakima, Washington—Abi, Heather, baby Oliver, and Zac



5/2018 Newborn Oliver Lytle with his proud big sister

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

It was really special to hear from **Eunice Paul** in England this month. She enjoys reading the newsletter every month and keeping up with old friends and learning about new members. Her husband **Bob Paul** was on the faculty of the Austin Presbyterian Seminary. She wrote, "On the first Sunday that **Bob** and I were in Austin, in the summer of 1977, we managed to find our way to the Congregational Church and even found somewhere to park. I still remember that, as we crossed the street to the church, we met you and **Mel**. You greeted us warmly and we felt welcome immediately.....We had ten very happy years in Austin and were at home in the church, though when **Bob** retired we decided to move back to England. **Bob** died more than 25 years ago and I had my 97th birthday at the end of September (Happy Birthday, **Rambie Briggs!**) so I am not very active but that doesn't stop me from remembering so many of those who were in the church forty years ago and some of whom are still there. It is great to recognise them in the wonderful photos you include. Please say "Hello" to anyone who remembers us."



1985 Church directory photo of Bob and Eunice Paul

Congratulations if you have made it this far!! **Pat** and **Mel Oakes** enjoyed a wonderful week-long visit with their daughter **Beth**, son-in-law **Eugene**, and granddaughter **Emily**, 17, and Ethan, 15, visiting from Iowa City. They attended the Peter Pan Golf Tournaments for the Equal Justice Center, they all went to Houston for an overnight so that **Emily** could take a look at Rice University (thumbs up!), they all came to church, and they enjoyed their second barbecue dinner of the week at the Salt Lick in Dripping Springs. **Beth** and **Eugene** enjoyed an overnight away and **Pat** and **Mel** reveled in having **Emily** and **Ethan** to themselves, enjoying family stories and cooking together. **Emily** brought her bassoon and **Ethan** brought his saxophone and they both actually practiced with no prompting (at the same time in different parts of the house--glorious cacophony) every day while in Austin. It paid off as they both made All-State later in the month.



10/7/18 Dave Ross took this picture of the Oakes-Buck family Pat, Ethan, Emily, Beth, Eugene, and Mel after church.

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



Tom VandeStadt, Robin Chapman, and their dog, Hastings, enjoyed a bit of winter during their end-of-October trip to northern New Mexico. They tried to hike Wheeler Peak, but had to turn back after getting half-way up because the snow was knee-deep (neck-deep for Hastings) and they didn't have proper snow gear. Nevertheless, the views and the cold mountain air were spectacular.