

THE VISITOR

December 2017

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

408 West Twenty-third Street, Austin, Texas 78705-5214
(512) 472-2370 Fax: (512) 472-1175
E-mail: ucausti@swbell.net

Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt



We begin this year's Advent with one of Isaiah's laments: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." A lament isn't so much sad as bitter. Grief shot through with anger. Pent up frustration exploding from a human heart. For me, and perhaps for you, it's appropriate to begin this year's Advent with an ancient lament. There's so much about our country that I'm lamenting as we enter Advent.

For starters, the Republican tax scheme. Simply put, it's disingenuous and unjust. Republicans are trying to create the illusion that it would benefit just about everyone. But factor in the cuts that are temporary and those that are permanent, the future reduction in government spending the growing deficit will cause, and the effect it will have on health care, and you quickly see the illusion is a lie.

For decades, the wealthiest Americans have managed to concentrate more of the nation's wealth and income into their hands. The Republican tax scheme won't just continue this trend, it'll shift it into a higher gear. *The New York Times* Editorial Board wrote of the proposed tax bills: "Republican leaders aren't just trying to transfer money from current middle-class and poor Americans to corporations and the very wealthy. They are also trying to transfer money from future middle-class and poor Americans to corporations and the very wealthy."

I'm lamenting the on-going concentration of income and wealth at the top, and the stress and anxiety, pain and suffering more people on the bottom and in the middle will experience as a result. I'm lamenting the power today's wealthy have to impose their will on our nation and our children.

Then there's Kathleen Hartnett White, the nominee to head the Council on Environmental Quality. If approved, she'll be Donald Trump's number one advisor on environmental policy. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee recently voted to move her nomination forward to a full Senate vote. Most recently, White has worked with the Koch-brothers funded right-wing think tank, Texas Public Policy Foundation. She has written extensively on her opposition to imposing any regulations on carbon dioxide emissions, arguing that carbon emissions pose no threat to human well-being.

I'm lamenting the Trump regime's self-serving dismissal of the global scientific consensus on climate change and the dangerous role carbon emissions play. I'm lamenting our nation's status as an irresponsible outlier on the issue of climate change.

Then Donald Trump re-tweeted three anti-Muslim videos that Jayda Fransen posted. She's the deputy leader of the far-right white supremacist group, Britain First. I was heartened by the storm of protest that erupted in Great Britain and the US, but equally disheartened by those who cheered Trump's act as a validation of their prejudice.

(cont. on p. 2)

(cont. from p. 1)

In September, James Fallows wrote a piece in the *The Atlantic* in which he described the difference between being shocked and being surprised by Donald Trump's words and deeds. Fallows was repeatedly shocked but not surprised by Trump because he'd learned to expect shocking things from Trump. It doesn't bode well when we're no longer surprised by the shocking things people say or do. People on the receiving end of the shock are at grave risk when it becomes routine for others to say shocking things about them and do shocking things to them. I'm lamenting the normalization of the shocking word and deed, and the violence that could result.

I know I'm beginning Advent on a dark note. But let's remember that Advent begins in darkness. That's why we light candles, because of the darkness. And the very first candle we light is hope. If the world were already shining bright with peace, joy and love, we wouldn't need to cling to the fierce and stubborn light of hope. Hope for the incarnation of peace, joy and love in this world. Hope that we ourselves can embody peace, joy and love, so that we ourselves can be Christ-like agents of transformation in this world.

May the light of hope be fierce and stubborn in your heart, and may it be a light that darkness can never overcome. May we as a church seek to embody the peace, joy and love that can transform this world.

TOM

January Visitor Deadline—Dec. 26, 2017

Church Leadership

Trustee Chair	Don Brown
Deacons Chair	Betty Bodman
Outreach Team	Whit Bodman
Moderator	John Goff
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
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

Personals
by Pat Oakes

There was a lot going on at the church on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. There were a number of folks visiting from out of town including **Michael Ross** (from Florida), **Rollin and Betsy Russell** (from North Carolina), **Ryan Neely Russell** (son of Stephen Russell and Scott Neely), his boyfriend from Tucson, **Charlie Landa**, and **Carol Barrett** (from California). The Deacons presented bibles to Sunday school students **Caleb Parkhill** and **William Harris**, who was also baptized. Caleb is ten years old, in the 4th grade, and attends Wayside Altamira Academy. William is 9 years old and in the 4th grade at Patton Elementary.



It was a big day for William James Harris who not only received his Bible from the Deacons but was also baptized, wearing his new suit for the occasion. back row—Stephen, Stephanie, and Jacob Land, Warinda's dad and stepmother, Warren and Reatta Johnson, Taylor and Lauryn Pierce, John Harris, Stephania Pierce, cousin of Warinda and mother of Taylor and Lauryn; front row--Warinda's mom Barbara Johnson, Warinda Harris, William Harris, Adrian Land

dent at the airport in Oklahoma on her way to see her mom. A brave stranger pulled Laura from her car before it caught fire and burned. Laura is shaken up but will be OK. Cathy is shaken up a bit, too, but was in church on Sunday singing with the choir. Amazing grace.



Fran and Rambie Briggs and Dave Ross enjoyed catching up with longtime friends Rollin and Betsy Russell and Carol Barrett.



The Deacons presented Bibles to two of our Sunday school students--Debby Kohrt to her grandson Caleb Parkhill and Joy Penticuff to William Harris.



Rev. Bob Breihan, almost 93, a longtime friend of our church and the husband of **Rev. Sarah Bentley**, who was an advocate for civil, human, and gender rights, who served as the Director of the Methodist Student Center for 20 years and later as associate pastor of **University Methodist Church**, died Nov. 4, 2017, after a brief illness. Bob also, with the help of Sarah and others, opened the New Life Institute in 1986 which provided Christian family, career and other counseling services to the Austin community for more than 25 years. During the '50s and '60s in Austin, he protested against the Vietnam War and worked for the integration of restaurants, theaters, and other venues. Bob stayed active in the community until his death. He and Sarah even attended the first visioning meeting for our church in late October. Bob was well-loved and respected in the Austin community. Several hundred people attended his beautiful memorial service which was held at University Methodist Church on Nov. 18. It was good to welcome Sarah to the service this past Sunday.

Cathy Hubbs had been looking forward to a visit from her daughter **Laura Hubbs-Tait** for Thanksgiving, but it was not to be. Laura was involved in a serious auto acci-

Heart of Texas Association News

December

by Liz Nash

At our Fall Meeting, the Heart of Texas Association affirmed the decision by our scholarship committee, board, and treasurer to initiate the Greg Felder Memorial Scholarship Fund to honor the memory of our brother in Christ, **Pastor Greg Felder**. The fund, which is now receiving donations, will provide scholarship money for persons in discernment for licensed ministry or for licensed ministers preparing for ordination in our association. All of our churches have received information via email about the fund and how to donate. For those who need more information, we invite you to contact me at lizknash@gmail.com or our treasurer, Joe Ward. We continue to lift up Greg's family, Friedens Church of Washington, St. John's UCC, and all whose lives Greg touched in prayer.

We welcome **St. Paul UCC**, Corpus Christi, to the Heart of Texas Association after the vote at our Fall Association Meeting to accept their request for their membership. Formerly a member church of the South Texas Association, St. Paul joined the Houston Association when our Association merger took place with the expectation that the distances to most of the Houston Association meetings would be somewhat shorter than to the HOT meetings. However, the driving distances are truly "Texas size" -- they now find that it will be easier for them to come to meetings and be part of our Association. We welcomed them in at the same time we voted to move all of our Association meetings to Saturdays, while also voting not to start our meetings before 11 am. Our aim is to make it easier for everyone to drive the distances to our meetings. We want to do what we can to welcome and include all of our churches.

We also congratulate both **Andrew Young** of Trinity Church of Austin and **C. J. Wood** of St. Paul Corpus Christi on the milestones they have reached on their paths to ordained ministry. Andrew's Ecclesiastical Council was held at our fall Association Meeting. We voted to approve him for ordination pending call, and now we lift him up to the movement of the Holy Spirit as he seeks to find where he will serve. C. J. was accepted at our November Committee on Ministry meeting as a Member in Discernment. She has a Master of Divinity from Truett Theological Seminary, has served as a Baptist missionary

in India, and is currently serving as a chaplain in the Christus Spohn hospital network in Corpus Christi. We look forward to walking with C. J. as she discerns God's call in her life.

On Saturday, November 18th, **Trinity Church of Austin** celebrated their 25th Anniversary as a Reconciling Congregation in the United Methodist Church (the equivalent of an Open and Affirming Church in the UCC) with a joyous dinner at the University of Texas Alumni Center. At the time of their vote in 1992, they became the Second Reconciling United Methodist Church in Texas. Theirs has been a history of courage in facing substantial opposition to their ministry, as well as a radical welcome to their very active and inclusive community. To honor this day and their leadership, the mayor of Austin declared November 18th "Trinity Church of Austin" day. Now that they are also a UCC church, Don Longbottom, my husband Reuel and I were honored to be part of the celebration. May God continue to bless their vibrant ministry.

Grace and peace in Christ,

Liz Nash
Association Minister

Personals (cont)

by Pat Oakes

This month we noted the 90th birthday of **Ruth Koenig** with a celebration during coffee hour on Nov. 19th. Ruth, who joined the church in 2012, has been an invaluable new member and has participated in many aspects of the church. As a special part of the celebration, Ruth invited her son John and his wife Barbara, her granddaughter Brett, her grandson-in-law Travis Greig (coincidentally one of Pat Oakes' former 6th graders) with their 4-year-old twin daughters Thea and Lottie. Ruth loves living in Austin with her family close by—particularly making cookies with Thea and Lottie. Her son John had his hip replaced the next day and he is doing just fine. A new term was invented by Ruth on this past Sunday. Some of you have been blessed to have a song dedicated to a special event in your life with



Barbara and John Koenig with Thea, Ruth Koenig, Travis and Brett Koenig Greig, with Lottie. Thea and Lottie are 4 year old twins—four generations.

the words written by our amazingly talented Nodie Murphy and usually sung to a familiar hymn. Ruth said in her thanks that she was so honored to be “Nodied!” Perhaps Nodie should officially be appointed the church poet laureate!

We haven't seen a lot of **Don and Sharon Brown** recently but they have happy news to share. In 5

an absolutely serendipitous happening, their next door neighbors had to move back to California and their son Andy, daughter-in-law Sarah, and grandchildren Hattie and Franklin were able to buy the house. Never in their fondest dreams did Don and Sharon imagine this. During the moving process, Don and Sharon moved to a neighbor's house across the alley (those neighbors were spending 6 months on the east coast with their grandchildren and offered their empty house) and Andy's family stayed in theirs for over three weeks. Andy and Sarah had decided to rent their house on East Second St. because that is a prime area for downtown folks. It rented very quickly and they couldn't move into the new house until the closing, so Don and Sharon were lucky to have an option in another space. Sharon reports that they have taken two pickets out of the backyard fence so the senior Browns and their dogs have easy access to their darling grandchildren. Clearly, this was meant to be!



10/31 17 Andy Brown with baby Franklin at the back center and Hattie and her mom Sarah on the front steps—Don and Sharon's house is in the background of the picture.

On Sunday, Nov. 19, at the Lois Perkins Chapel on the campus of Southwestern University there was a glorious choral concert performed by the **San Gabriel Chorale** celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and featuring composers J. S. Bach, Michael Praetorius, and Heinrich Schutz. Nodie Murphy has sung with the group since the Georgetown Festival of the Arts concert in early June of 2011. Nodie fans who came to the concert included Dennis Murphy, Lynne Lemley, Pat and Mel Oakes, and Stephen Russell and Scott Neely.



Stephen Russell masterminding the selfie of Stephen , Scott Neely, Lynne Lemley, Dennis and Nodie Murphy, Mel and Pat Oakes after Nodie's performance with the San Gabriel Chorale in Georgetown

In early November, **Fran and Rambie Briggs** spent a week in Victoria, British Columbia, with their friends David and Karlyn Stephens. David and Karlyn were director and program director at Back Bay Mission from 1972 to 1999. Recently the Biloxi paper published articles about the "wade-in" at Biloxi Beach which took place in 1962. The UCC pastor Rev. Roger Gallagher, director of Back Bay Mission at the time, appeared in one of the pictures. The pastor of the UCC church in Biloxi, the Rev. Jack Aregood, also participated in the "wade-in". David contacted Joy Aregood, Jack's widow, who gave him the Gallagher's telephone number and contact information as they



David Stephens and Roger Gallagher enjoyed visiting while in Victoria, BC.

now live in Victoria. The participants in the wade-in were arrested and spent 3 days in jail. UCC lawyers from New York helped get the case against Roger and Jack dismissed. The controversy resulted in Biloxi Beach being integrated because of the "wade-in" but also led to the UCC church disbanding. Fran and Rambie and David and

Karlyn visited with Roger and Donna Gallagher at their home in Victoria. Roger is 89 and Donna 87. Roger had an auto accident several years ago and struggles with short term memory problems, but the past is still fresh in his mind. He had great stories to tell about his 2 years in Biloxi. This visit was the highlight of the Victoria trip. Otherwise, the trip was successful in spite of temperatures that hovered in the 40's. The condo afforded great views of the Inner Harbor and the cloud-covered mountains in the distance. Butchart Gardens, even in winter, was beautiful with fall colors. The Royal British Columbia Museum occupied two days of their time with so much to see and learn. The Briggs enjoyed their trip to Victoria and 2 days in Seattle with Rambie's cousins Tom and Judy before returning to warm temperatures in Texas.

Don Miles will have two great-grandchildren by February. His daughter, Juliette, reports that her oldest son, Austin, and his wife, Abby, welcomed Joshua into the world on November 1. She also says that her youngest son, Garrett, and his wife, Tiffany, are expecting a child (gender not yet announced) in late January. Don was driving to Ft. Benning, Georgia, to celebrate Thanksgiving with his daughter's family. In December, he will drive to Washington, D.C., to celebrate Christmas with his son Richard and family.

Tommie Pinkard sends her love to all of us. She is doing well but misses our church and our church family. There is no UCC church in Brevard—she has tried several other churches, but has not found a match yet. She is pleased to report that she has recently finished a 6 month PT pulmonary rehab program at a local hospital and has increased her performance by about 50 percent. Six months ago she made it around a large room 7 times in 6 minutes and when she graduated 6 months later she did 11 times around the room in 6 minutes. She is feeling better and stronger and sounds great!

We all missed violinist **Amy Harris** in the trio on the 19th, but she was visiting her mom Karen Harris in Ft. Morgan, Colorado. If the locale sounds a bit familiar it is because that is where Beth Gleason accepted the call to minister to Christ Congregational UCC Church. Karen grew up in the church where Beth now ministers, and Karen got married there. As a child, Amy attended the church and Sunday school when she would visit, and her grandfather and grandmother's funerals were both held there. Now Amy's aunt and cousin (and his daughter) all attend that same UCC church! To clarify things, Amy says, " My mother is Karen Harris (formerly Wunsch). Her parents were William and Violet Wunsch. My aunt and uncle are Laurie and Walter Wunsch. My mother was married in the church to my dad, Doug Harris, by her oldest brother, Ronald Wunsch who was a chaplain in the Air Force, and then retired to minister a large UCC congregation in Indiana." It is definitely a small world



Pastor Beth Gleason had special visitors at church on Nov. 19th. Beth with Greg Futch who drove in from Denver and Amy Harris who was visiting her mom Karen who grew up and married in Beth's church—Christ Congregational in Ft. Morgan!



Karen Harris with her daughter Amy at Christ Congregational UCC in Ft. Morgan, Colorado.

Marilyn Gaddis and George Carruthers' Fall Road Scholar trip at the end of October took them from "Asheville to Nashville." Their arrival in Asheville was marked by snow flurries and a few days of very cold temps. While in Asheville, the group toured author Thomas Wolfe's home and as a contrast, the Biltmore Estates, a magnificent structure set in the Blue Ridge Mountains. A

lunch stop the next day in Knoxville included the "Blue Plate Special," a live radio broadcast. On to Berea, Kentucky to visit Berea College, a unique institution established to provide higher education for needy Appalachian youth. No tuition is charged but students must work a minimum of ten hours a week in various roles around the school. They stayed in the 1909 Boone Tavern Inn for two nights while learning about the college and the culture of the area. At Frankfort, a tour of the capitol and a visit to Buffalo Trace Distillery (for an understanding of bourbon production) was included. En route to Louisville, they stopped at a saddlebred horse farm and *My Old Kentucky Home State Park*, Stephen Foster's Home, where mint ju-



George Carruthers and Marilyn Gaddis at the Churchill Downs museum on their recent Road Scholar trip

leps were enjoyed! The next day at Churchill Downs, they watched race horses being exercised and walked through the Kentucky Derby Museum. At Bowling Green, a stop was made at the Corvette Museum to see the cars and the sinkhole where eight priceless Corvettes fell in on February 12, 2014. (All but one have been recovered and restored.) Arriving in Nashville, they walked around Bicentennial State Park. The highlight of the last program day was a visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, the "Grand Ole Opry" and the Ryman Auditorium will have to be enjoyed on the next visit. Marilyn was scheduled for a hip replacement on Nov. 27th, but she made it through the trip with very few problems.

History Corner

Christmas pageants have a long tradition in our church. Back in the early 1970s one stellar performance featured Five Wise Persons and the baby Jesus was a real baby—and a girl at that! If you happen to have an old picture of your child/children in a past pageant at the church, please scan it, let me scan it, or make me a copy of it and send it to me for our archive—labeled and dated, please. Enjoy the photos of relatively recent Christmas pageants.



12/05 After the Christmas pageant with Jim Howicz, Savanna Tucker, Alex VandeStadt, and Becky Nash.



12/05 Christmas pageant back--Cameron Goff, Emily Binford, ?, Emily Howicz, Wamene Yowika, Noah Binford; front--Megan Goff, Tiina Tapia's niece, Giovanni Fracasso, Katie Lemley



12/16/07 Savanna Tucker and Megan Goff ready for the church Christmas pageant--Giovanni Fracasso and Tess Howicz in the background.



12/21/14 The cast of the church Christmas pageant l-r Alden Harris, William Harris, Megan Goff, Savanna Tucker, John Dietz, Francesca Dietz, Harrison Tucker, and Isabella Dietz; teacher Amy Rivera holding up the words for the cast



12/16/07 Church cherubs ready for the Christmas pageant-- Isabella, Francesca, and John Dietz--Becky Hash with Stella Fracasso and Tess Howicz in the back right.