

THE VISITOR

March 2023

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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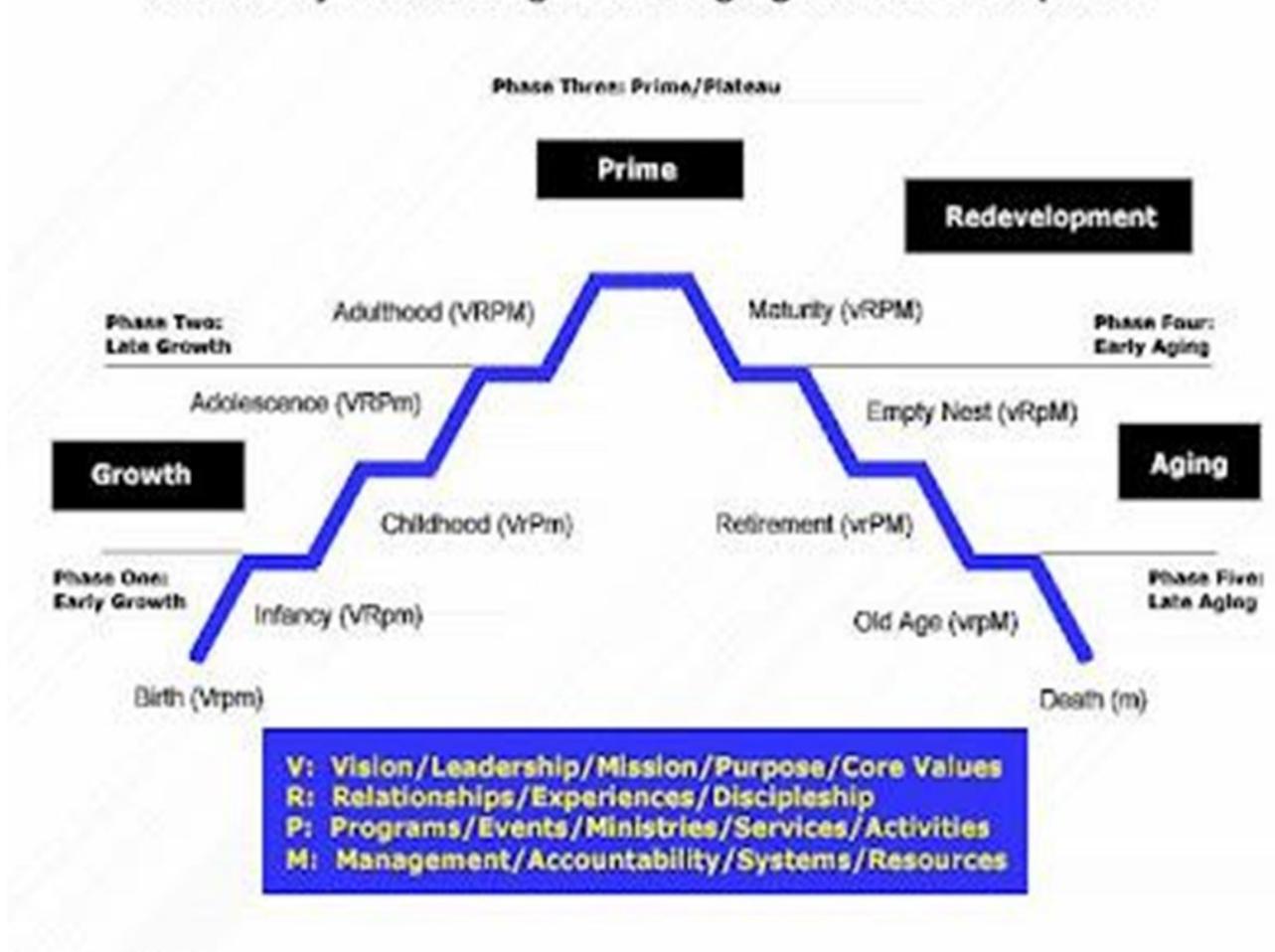
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Rev. Amelia Fulbright, Transitional Pastor

The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development



“Rebirth & Relationships”

It’s been a while since I shared with you all a graphic like this. This is a depiction of the life cycle of a church, theorized by Rev. George Bullard in 2001. It has become a tool commonly used across denominational settings by pastors and church growth experts to chart the life cycle of churches and to understand how a congregation might experience rebirth and renewal after a period of decline. The image is not as crisp as I’d like, but hopefully you can decipher the basic patterns.

You'll notice that at each phase of congregational development, there are some letters—V, R, P, and M—noted in parentheses, in different states of lowercase and capitalization. As Bullard theorized, at each stage in the life cycle of a church, one or more of these aspects of the church's life become dominant. In the beginning, Vision is in the driver's seat. Without a clear vision, no faith community ever really forms in the first place. But very quickly after the birth of a vision, the nurturing of Relationships must begin to take precedence or no vision will ever be brought to fruition. Eventually, as a critical mass of people takes shape, Programs and Ministries will begin to develop that can then welcome in more people to carry out the church's original founding vision. What often happens as a congregation moves past its prime and into a stage called "maturity" is that vision starts to wane, programs and ministries run almost on autopilot without much sense of mission, and less attention is paid to nurturing new relationships. When this happens, without the renewal of vision, a congregation will gradually shift into decline or aging. A telltale sign of aging is that the members and leaders of a congregation spend more time on institutional management and maintenance tasks than on ministries and relationship-building.

One clue that CCA is in the Aging phase, besides the decline in membership, is how much time leadership had to devote to management/maintenance tasks in 2022—security issues, a mold remediation project, and difficult budgeting decisions, to name a few. Though these tasks must be done, one way or another, they are not typically the things that bring people joy and energy the way that an inspiring vision, authentic relationships, and opportunities to serve can do. ***The key to rebirth and the start of a new life cycle is a renewal of Vision and a refocusing on Relationships—both the relationships between longtime members and the intentional cultivation of relationships with new people.***

We've spent a lot of time talking about mission and vision over the last year, repeatedly asking, "What is God calling us to do?" Perhaps we are still refining the answer to that question, but I think it's fair to say that some consistent themes have emerged:

- *We want to continue being a theologically open, deep thinking church.*
- *We want to retain our distinctive commitments to social justice work.*
- *We want to continue being a radically inclusive community and even expand our efforts to be racially inclusive, accessible to people with disabilities, and boldly open and affirming.*
- *We want to grow our faith community by welcoming in new members of all ages, including younger adults and children.*

But do we really want to grow? Do we really want to welcome new people? New people inevitably bring in new ideas and new ways of doing things...do we really want that?!! A few of you have been bold enough to say that you're not so sure you do, and I want you to know that I appreciate your honesty! The fact is that most congregations are ambivalent about the new; it is totally normal and 100% human to feel this way. New is hard, and there are no guarantees.

But here is where the Gospel meets the road. *The failure to welcome the new puts us at risk of turning a church into a social club.* In an age where loneliness is an epidemic, for people of all ages, we have a divine imperative to keep expanding our circle wider, offering the gift of Beloved Community to all those within our reach. That means paying special attention to the guests and strangers who enter our sanctuary doors, as well as going out into the community and inviting people to become part of our collective. Faith comes alive when we take the risk of trusting that the new people/ideas/practices that Spirit brings to us will enrich our lives, as well.

I'd love to know your thoughts about the Bullard Church Life Cycle image. What ideas do you have for helping us to clarify Vision and nurture Relationships? What encouragement can you offer as we navigate this shift from old age back to infancy and try our darndest to begin again?

With love & hope,
Pastor Amelia

April Visitor Deadline March 24, 2022

Church Leadership

Trustee's Chair	Kevin Dietz
Deacon's Chair	John Goff
Outreach Coordinator	Joy Penticuff
Moderator	Liz Nash
Treasurer	Pam Tucker
Financial Secretary	Jaime Hadley
Children's Sunday School	Kay Pruett
Youth Sunday School	Open
Clerk	Reuel Nash
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Member-at-Large	Bill Beardall
Pastor	Amelia Fulbright
Dir. of Online Ministries	Britt Hicks
Director of Music	Laura Martin

Personals by Pat Oakes

Family and friends celebrated the long and productive life of **Ruth Eleanor Fissel Koenig** on Sunday, February 19 at 2 p.m. at the church. Ruth died on Sept. 10, 2022, at the age of 94. She dearly loved her family—and all of her descendants except for 1 great-grandchild were able to come for a long weekend for a time of remembrance and togetherness—something that would have pleased **Ruth** so much. To see the program, the slide show shown at the service and for more information on **Ruth**, go to <https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/RuthEKoenig.html>

From Jan. 31st-Feb. 2nd, 2023, the Austin area experienced an unusual and destructive ice storm. Power was out for days for thousands of folks and the scary sound of falling limbs and branches was heard everywhere. Trees which had lost their leaves were mostly OK, but trees such as live oaks were greatly stressed by the additional weight of ice-covered leaves. **Ann Locasio** reports, “I was lucky this time. The lights flickered off and, on a few times, sending me running for my flashlight, sweaters, and battery-operated radio, but I was spared a power outage.” **Reuel Nash** says, “We didn't lose power, but a nearby friend did, and **Becky** did, so the friend stayed with us a few nights, and **Becky** stayed one night. **Becky** also lost several trees, but fortunately the falling trees missed nearby cars.” **Whit Bodman** shared on Feb. 9th, “I was in NJ, but **Betty** was home. A large branch crushed our screen porch and put a hole in our roof. The porch will be demolished tomorrow. We did not lose power, and no frozen pipes.”



2/19/23 Ruth Koenig's memorial service--Warinda Harris sharing her memories of Ruth



2/3/23 A huge branch from the old oak tree demolished the Bodman's screen porch



2/19/23 Ruth Koenig's memorial service—Pastor Amelia offering the benediction



2/3/23 A workman patching the hole in the Bodmans' roof

Personals by Pat Oakes

Bill Beardall and his wife **Jeanne** (who usually works remotely from home) were without power for five days. They figured out pretty quickly that they could work at the Equal Justice Center which they did—charging up phones and using the computers there—also eating there—heading for home about 9 p.m. **Lucy Erda** reports, "There are two fire stations and a nursing home on my section of the power grid. This is the first time that we lost power for any significant amount of time. Power went off at 3:00 a.m. (when my battery backups alarmed so I could power down the work server) and was back on by 2:00 p.m. I was the only member of my support team that had power and internet so I ended up working 10 hours all during the event to make sure our customers could still get service from us. I adopted two kittens the week before the storm. It's easy to relax when you have one purring kitten wrapped around your arm and another sleeping in your lap."



1/23 The orange and white kitten is Molly Two Socks and the other sweet kitten is Beatrice Mighty Mittens.

Dave Ross says, "Our power was out for five days plus. A kind neighbor across the street ran an electric cord so we could plug a few things in. On our side of the street the whole block was down. On the other side they were all up. Not unusual for us. Our transformer blows from time to time. A big branch came down from our live oak but didn't do serious damage. Could have been much worse." **Mel and Pat Oakes** count themselves as very lucky as they never lost power and no tree limbs fell on their roof (although some ice-covered branches were resting on the roof). As the ice melted, the branches went back to their normal level. They have lots of branches/limbs piled up all around their corner like many of

their neighbors. They were able to piggyback on a tree service who were working at a house up the street who cleared up most of the damage. Other neighbors came down over several days to help with the smaller cleanup—including some children, so **Pat** got busy making cookies which they hand-delivered to their helpful neighbors.



2/1/23 Ice storm damage—a neighbor took these from his house--and since then another huge limb has fallen and lodged high up in a tree on the right front-which means more will probably be coming down

The **Briggs's** lovely oaks in the front of their house are much diminished by the ice storm. On the brighter side, there was no damage to house or electric lines. Their neighbor's son came out to check on his parents and freed them by removing limbs from the driveway and gate. Then they and the neighbor found a landscaper to work two days on both properties clearing debris. **Lynne and George Lemley's** excitement during the ice storm was when the wires across their backyard caught fire somehow and the fire ended up destroying their transformer. They were without power for 36 hours. **Geneva Ross** and her husband were driving back on I-10 from a funeral in California when they encountered the icy weather. There was a 40-mile backup caused by a 12-vehicle crash—utter devastation, numerous huge trucks on the side of the road. **Geneva** said that it was clear that truckers should be required to learn how to drive in icy conditions. They turned back and found a motel in Van Horn and made it home the next day. Unfortunately, when they got home, they had no power and did not get it back for three more days—no damage to their house or trees, though. **Pam Tucker** notes, "My ice storm news is not much. Power out for 20 hours, but when it went off, my brain couldn't

Personals by Pat Oakes

think of anything but the ice storm 2 years ago when I didn't have power for over 3 days and no hot water for a month. Fortunately, that was not the case. It never got really cold inside and I could still cook on the gas stove. Once power came back, I had hot water and heat. I have two beautiful Spanish Oak trees, but neither was damaged. There are large and small limbs down all over the neighborhood though. I went to work every day except Friday morning when I cut up trees at the church.”



2/2/23 Lots of limbs/branches down at the church
photo credit — Donna Cravens



2/2/23 Lots of limbs/branches down at the church
photo credit — Donna Cravens



2/3/23 Pam Tucker cleaning up the church grounds
photo credit, Donna Cravens



2/2/23 Lots of limbs/branches down at the church
photo credit — Donna Cravens



2/3/23 Pam Tucker cleaning up the church grounds
photo credit, Donna Cravens

Personals by Pat Oakes



2/3/23 Pam Tucker cleaning up the church grounds
photo credit, Donna Cravens

Nodie Murphy was in San Antonio visiting with her daughter **Sarah Sennour** and her family exploring future housing options for her when the storm hit. She was prepared to go back home to Round Rock but ended up staying several extra days in San Antonio until her power in Round Rock was restored—but then all of the internet connections were down. **Jaime Hadley** was without power for three days and since he cannot stand the silence and he needs to use his cpap machine, he stayed in hotels those nights. He had several limbs down in his yard, but he was able to get those all cut up and put to the curb.

Beth Gleason says, “Just say that the tallest peak in New England, Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, broke all records for cold temps....it was something like -118 degrees with the wind chill. I was in San Diego last week and missed the weather drama back home...yay!” She definitely noted that San Diego was quite the contrast.

The **Nashes** were really pleased to have a dozen people from church over for movie night. Lots of fun. **Reuel** notes, "The ‘fellowship’ time while everyone stood around and talked was going so well, I was wondering if we could get people to sit and eat dinner! The movie was 'Everything Everywhere All at Once.' Like **Reuel** said in church on the 5th of February, it was ‘interesting.’ Extremely energetic. Multiple parallel universes. **Reuel** felt like it had an analogy to 'Groundhog Day' in that the main character has to keep trying different things until she gets it right.

There was a good group at Easy Tiger on

S. Lamar for the Young-ish Adult group which met after church on a recent Sunday. **Laura Martin, Amy Harris, CJ Wood, and Radhika Hicks** were also there, but not pictured. A good time was had by all.



2/12/23 Folks at the Young-ish Adults gathering--George and his dad Jonathan Zercher, Vivienne Zercher, René Slataper, Britt Hicks, Jonathan Geer with Xitlali, Roberto Hernandez with Sebastian at Easy Tiger on South Lamar

Marilyn Vaché is delighted to announce that she is a grandmother!!! Her daughter **Olivia** and **Matthew Greene** married in 2017. They just had their first child, a girl, **Eloise Sophia Greene**. She weighed in at 8 lb 12 oz on Dec 27th and now is over 10 lb. They live in the Boston area and **Marilyn's** in southeast Connecticut, so they're within 1-1/2 hours by train or car. She has been able to visit several times and now that **Marilyn** is retired, she will probably continue to go help out for a couple of days a week. She says, "We are blessed."



2/23 Marilyn Vaché's adorable grand-daughter Eloise

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes



2/23 Marilyn Vaché's adorable grand-daughter Eloise with her parents Olivia and Matthew

now. She will be really glad when she gets the large cast off!

Ches Towery is pleased to announce that his daughter **Krystal Towery McMahan** had her baby girl on January 30th. The baby weighted 7 lbs, 6 oz, & was 22 inches long. The baby's name is **Leanne Hays McMahan**. **Leanne** is home & doing well as are her parents, **Krystal** and **Cole**.

Pat and **Mel Oakes** enjoyed a wonderful five day visit with **Pat's** brother who was visiting from L.A. They had tried this past summer to get together in San Francisco, but **Pat** and **Mel** got Covid at the time he could come—so that didn't work. They tried again in January when **Robert** had to cancel his trip because he got 16 inches of rain in about 6 hours threatening his home (all is well, so far). This time the visit worked out very well—the third time was the charm!



11/21/23 Robert Winter, Pat and Mel Oakes in front of the piles of debris from the early February ice storm

Carol Burlinson is having an adventure she didn't want. In late January she stepped off a sidewalk, miscalculated, fell and broke her right wrist—so things are moving rather slowly for her right

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Marilyn Vaché moved to Connecticut several years ago, but she has kept in touch with us and has a lot of the pictures she took while here. She was going through some old photos several weeks ago when she came across a large group that were taken on April 3, 2016—the Sunday that our church in conjunction with the Nueces mosque got together after our church service, had a time of visiting at both places, and then the banner supporting our Muslim neighbors was hung from the Towery wing of the church. Thank you so much, **Marilyn!** If anyone sees someone they know in the pictures below and remembers their name, please let me know. In fact, if you are looking at old church photos and think they might be of interest to folks who read The History Corner, please send them to me—if possible, dated and identified.



4/3/2016 Ready to hang the new supporting our Muslim neighbors banner



4/3/2016 At CCA waiting for our new banner supporting our Muslim neighbors to be hung

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



4/3/2016 Ruth Koenig back left, Bob Garrett and Jo Jensen next to Ruth, George Hetrick and Greg Futch in blue shirts at the Nueces mosque



4/3/2016 Harrison Tucker and his mom Pam at the after church celebration of the hanging of the banner supporting our Muslim neighbors

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



4/3/2016 ?, Bonnie Tamres-Moore , ?, Whit Bodman, and imam Shaykh Umer Isma'il at the mosque



4/3/2016--Nodie Murphy, Bob Garrett , and Jo Jensen near the stop sign, Bill Mueller talking with Bill Beardall in the center, Imam Shaykh Isma'il in the white, Greg Futch on the right

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



4/3/2016 Bob Garrett, Jaime Hadley, and Betty Bodman at CCA on the Sunday our banner supporting our Muslim neighbors was installed



4/3/2016 Bill Mueller, Nodie Murphy, and Ruth Koenig on the Sunday that the church hung the banner supporting our Muslim neighbors

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



4/3/2016 Imam Shaykh Isma'il with Bonnie Tamres-Moore and Pastor Tom VandeStadt at the installation of a banner supporting our Muslim neighbors



4/3/2016 Barbara Burnham with Jaana Rehbein at the celebration of the hanging of our new banner supporting our Muslim neighbors

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



4/3/2016 Our new banner supporting our Muslim neighbors