

# THE VISITOR

December 2023

## The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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### Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, Interim Pastor

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“Hurry up and wait!”

If ever there was a mantra for the month of December, it would be the phrase, “*Hurry up and wait.*” December is always a rush of extra events, tasks, and preparations that must be accomplished on top of our jam-packed lives at home, school, and church. Sometimes the chaos of December feels like the Bugs Bunny character, the Tasmanian devil, that is constantly in a frenetic swirl of movement. But December is also about waiting for the actual events we rushed to prepare for at a record pace. And for children, the waiting is the worst part of the month: waiting for Santa, presents, and the joy of Christmas day.

I love the fact that Advent is the holy season when we do both as a spiritual practice. Before the leftover turkey is out of our refrigerators, we are preparing the sanctuary with poinsettias, candles, and advent carols. And then we wait. Each week, we prepare the nativity with stories about John the Baptizer, the prophet Isaiah speaking hope into hopelessness, and an unwed teenage girl finding support in her older cousin, Elizabeth. The polarity of paces shows that God is creating new life in the midst of the chaotic and docile speeds.

“Hurry up and wait!”

In many ways, Advent is a precursor for our journey together in the next year at the Congregational Church of Austin, UCC. Our Task Force on our Redevelopment Project is picking up steam as we prepare to develop Request for Qualifications for a real estate broker and later Request for Proposals for a developer. Our Coordinating Council is busily preparing for how we will relocate as a church in the next year. And, this redevelopment and relocation process is going to take a while – probably longer than any of us imagine right now. God will be at work in the frenetic and docile paces of our redevelopment.

This Advent, I invite you to sit with this reality as you journey each week leading up to Christmas eve. What are the sacred stories that ground us for our journey? What opportunities are all around us to celebrate God’s new life forming within us? How is God at work as we still ourselves and wait? Where is God’s liberating hope in the midst of hopeless moments?

*O come, o come Emmanuel, as we hurry up and wait this Advent season. May you prepare our bodies, minds, and souls for our journey of transformation as a congregation so that your love may be born in us for the liberation of your creation. Amen.*

I look forward to hurrying up and waiting with you this Advent and redevelopment journey.

Blessings,  
Ginny

**January's Visitor Deadline December 26, 2023**

## **Church Leadership**

Trustee's Chair	Kevin Dietz
Deacon's Chair	John Goff
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	Ginny Brown Daniel
Dir. of Online Ministries	Open
Director of Music	Laura Martin

**Personals (cont.)**  
**by Pat Oakes**

To help you all get into the Christmas spirit, click on this link <https://congregationalchurchofaustin.org/ministry/music-and-fine-arts/> and listen to “Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child!” It was recorded about 2018. You’ll recognize folks from years ago. Enjoy! Perhaps it is time for us to record it again with a new cast of characters. There is still a lot of overlap.

The first church talent show in a number of years (maybe 2018 was the last one) was held on Sunday afternoon, October 29th. Music director **Laura Martin** organized the gathering on Sunday afternoon at 2:30. **Barbara Burnham** read a poem, “Goldilocks in Denial” by the deaf/blind poet by **John Lee Clark**. **Amy Harris** sang “Ach, ich Fühls” from the Magic Flute by Mozart and was accompanied by **Jonathan Geer**. Four-year-old **Xitlali Hernandez-Geer** played the “Ant Song” on her violin with her dad **Jonathan’s** assistance. **Rev. Ginny** shared her stained-glass projects. Versatile **Becca Rosson** played both guitar and piano and even serenaded the audience with a song, “This is Halloween.” Her sister **Sam Rosson** (who plays the piano for her Covington Middle School orchestra) played the piano. **Joy Penticuff** gave a tutorial on a quick and beautiful painting project. **Bill Beardall** sang and played guitar for the jazz/blues classic “St. James Infirmary.” **Jonathan Geer** shared one of his compositions and the story behind it (please read below). **Dave Ross** gave a dramatic reading of “Go Down, Death” by **James Weldon Johnson**. **Robin Rosson** sang and played the guitar. The event raised \$325.00 for the church music fund!



10/29/23 Bill Beardall singing and playing his guitar



10/29/23 Joy Penticuff showing how to create a beautiful painting



10/29/23 Xitlali Hernandez-Geer getting some help from her dad Jonathan before playing "The Ant Song"

Photos cont. on the next page

## Personals (cont.) by Pat Oakes



10/29/23 Becca Rosson playing the guitar for the church talent show



10/29/23 Dave Ross reading "Go Down, Death" by James Weldon Johnson

**Jonathan Geer** says, "I wrote this soundtrack for a cooking video game (it's a whole genre!) and ended up putting a lot of vocals into it. The first example I sang at the talent show was a song called "A la Idavay!" and it was just pig Latin applied to Spanish. It starts off with the words "toda la familia" (all the family) which turns into "odatay ala amil-

iafay". So, even though Spanish speakers don't really do this, it made for some fun and whimsical vocals. I found out from **Roberto** that Spanish speakers do something similar but different called "hablar en F" or "hablar en P" and the second longer example I sang at the talent shows uses "hablar en F". That song is called "Mufuchofo Gufustofu" and we can look at the title to see how "hablar en F" works. Most of you probably know the phrase "Mucho gusto!" (nice to meet you!) and if you want to "hablar en F" you insert an extra syllable between each existing syllable: Mu(fu)-cho(fu) Gu(fu)sto (fo). I absolutely had to write out every single lyric for all the songs I did on this soundtrack because I cannot do this in real time so don't you dare ask me to! It was, as you can imagine, a very fun soundtrack to create though." **Jonathan**, we certainly understand why you can't do the above at the drop of a hat!

The Sunday after Thanksgiving (the 26th), **Shelby Nowland**, director of Labyrinth and member of our church, was the guest preacher as **Pastor Ginny** was on vacation (enjoying time with family—especially her dad—who were feeling sad about Auburn's football loss). **Gail Christeson** was the worship leader. During the joys and concerns, **Shelby** shared that he and his partner of 4 years, **Rev. Jacob Brenton**, pastor of the UCC church in Robinson, TX, had decided to be married at University Baptist Church on Monday, the 27th, in a small service for family and friends. Congratulations to you both, **Shelby** and **Jacob**!!



11/26/23 Shelby Nowland preaching on the Sunday after Thanksgiving

**Personals (cont.)**  
by Pat Oakes

**Fran and Rambie Briggs** took a trip recently to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, their first one since 2019. They met their son **Jonathan** there and visited old friends **Karlyn Stephens, Bruno, and Linda Schroeder**. They also toured Back Bay Mission and met the new staff. It brought back many fond memories of Biloxi and Ocean Springs. The weather was beautiful and the food delicious. If any of you are ever that way, take time to tour the mission and see what great work is being done by the UCC. While they were there, **Jonathan** was talking with the director about how the mission was run. Just before Thanksgiving, **Jonathan** called his folks to say he was offered the Back Bay Mission job in Biloxi as Director of Services with details to be worked out. They are very happy and excited for him!



11/6/23 In Biloxi (Back) Josh Beauchamp, Jonathan Briggs, Bruno Schroeder, Rambie Briggs; (front) Karlyn Stephens, Fran Briggs, Linda Schroeder

**Lucy Erda** very much enjoys singing in the choir when she does not have to work on Sundays. Several weeks ago, **Lucy** was able to go out to Creedmoor and visit **Betty Phillips**, her good friend and former voice teacher. On a whim, **Lucy** decided to take flowers to **Betty** who was just delighted. **Lucy** had bought gorgeous yellow roses without knowing that **Betty's** late husband **Bill** when he bought her flowers, they were always yellow roses. **Lucy** also had a chance to visit with **Katy, Betty's** daughter, who has a small ranch where she and **Betty** live. They both wish us all a happy holiday season.



11/23 Betty Phillips with beautiful yellow roses brought to her by Lucy Erda

The congregation is getting into the swing of things as we continue through our visioning process for the future of the church. After the service and the sharing of joys and concerns, we adjourn to the fellowship hall for a light lunch. We then reconvene in the sanctuary and have the discussion for that day—relying on reports from the small discussion groups which are also meeting separately during this time of envisioning what our future holds. **Pastor Ginny** does a great job of keeping us on topic and dismissing us by about 1:30 p.m.



11/19/23 Lunch with folks before having our visioning meeting - On the pew--Oasis Ables, Warinda Harris, Pam Tucker, center table--Sarah Darter, CJ Wood, Sarah Bentley, Kay Pruett, Ann Locasio, Barbara Burnham, Dave Ross, Michael Ross, Sara Ross, Lynn Chavarria, right hand table--Pat Oakes, Lucy Erda--not shown--Roberto Hernandez, Jonathan Geer, and Bill Beardall (Mel Oakes took the picture)

**Personals (cont.)**  
**by Pat Oakes**

**Pam Tucker** reports, "The **Tucker** kids were home for Thanksgiving and **Pam** was THANKFUL! **Sav** had the week off, so she came in on Monday along with her boyfriend, **Xavier** (a senior at UT) and **Harrison** only got Thursday and Friday off and came in on Wednesday night. My niece, **Jennifer**, drove in from Dallas on Wednesday as well. **Jennifer** and I cooked ham & turkey breast, plus plenty of sides and pecan tassies for dessert. I tend to try new recipes for the sides, and one was a flop, but the rest were good. We played games Thursday night and Friday night (I love games) including Foolish, Rummikub, Kings Corner, and Up and Down the River (also known as Oh Hell). We didn't get to play my favorite — 42—, but we all had a great time playing. On Saturday, the **Tucker** three did our ritual photo shoot for Christmas pictures. It is always great to have the kids at home. They have promised to come to church with me during the Christmas break. We'll see."



11/24/23 Harrison and Savanna Tucker home from college for Thanksgiving with their mom Pam Tucker

**Ann Locasio** shares, "I had a wonderful surprise recently. Two friends from college days, **Paul** and **Brenda**, called me from their hotel in Austin to see if we could get together. It was their first trip to Austin; they live in Ohio. It has been 43 years since I saw them and, in that time, they got married and had children and grandchildren. We went to New York City together in 1980 and reminisced about that. We also enjoyed an Austin Duck Adventure tour, the LBJ museum, and topnotch Tex-Mex food at the Eldorado Cafe. "That was the best burrito I've ever eaten," **Brenda** said. The joy overflows."



Mid-November 2023 Ann Locasio with long-time friends Paul and Brenda visiting from Ohio enjoying delicious Tex-Mex tin Austin

**Jonathan Geer** reporting for the **Hernandez-Geer** family says, "For the past few years **Roberto** and I always liked to go camping after our bigger family Thanksgiving gathering at my mom's house in Waxahachie, but this year we suggested to everyone that we could just do a big family camping trip for the holiday, and everybody loved the idea. I had been wanting to go to Caddo Lake (the world's largest cypress forest!!) for quite a while and I made the reservations for us back in August and fortunately almost everyone was able to come. Though it got a bit chilly in the evening and early morning the weather was beautiful. Our campsites were right next to Saw Mill Pond and just about all of us took turns on the canoe. **Xitlali** had a wonderful time playing with all her many cousins (especially Autumn) and Sebastian was joyfully overwhelmed with all the sights and sounds of the forest and could not stop exploring. Hopefully we'll continue the tradition next year at another campsite!"



11/22/23 Roberto Hernandez with daughter Xitlali Hernandez-Geer canoeing in Caddo Lake

## Personals (cont.) by Pat Oakes



11/22/23 Jonathan Geer with Sebastian and Xitlali



11/23/23 The whole crew at Caddo Lake! Top Row-- Jonathan, Matthew (oldest brother) and his son Benjamin, wife Rachel and their son Andrew and daughters Emily and Kezia; Bottom Row: Xitlali, Peter and daughter Autumn, Matthew's son Luke, Roberto, Jonathan's mom Trish, Sebastian, Matthew's son Thomas and daughter Allison, Trish Geer's husband

**Betty Bodman** writes, "**Reuel and Liz Nash** were up in NYC on their way to a Thanksgiving holiday in Vermont. During their NYC stay, **Reuel** worked while **Liz** and I took a Circle Line boat tour around Manhattan on a beautiful fall day—sitting on the top deck - down the Hudson, around the Statue of Liberty, then up the East River and around the northern tip of the island to return to our starting point on the Hudson. On Saturday, **Reuel and Liz** came over to Jersey City and we had lunch together at our place. **Whit** and I spent Thanksgiving at our son-in-law's parents' house in PA. We had a great visit in a

house filled with a constant flow of family, friends, children and dogs. Everyone cooked and everyone ate well. Now some of us have to pay for all that eating with some strict dieting."



11/18/23 Reuel and Liz Nash visiting Whit and Betty Bodman at their home in Jersey City

**Liz Nash** continues the story, "On the Saturday when we were there, **Reuel** and I took the PATH train over to Jersey City. They live close to the station so Betty met us there and we walked to their place. We got the grand tour, visited their church briefly (which had a community group using it and is down the street from them), they served us a nice lunch, and we had a really good visit. **Betty** topped it off by taking us to a great cookie place to send us back to Manhattan with something tasty. On our drive up to Vermont, we stopped at our house in progress in the Berkshires and connected with **Annie** to meet with our construction team. It is such a joy to see the house that our family will share, we hope over generations, take shape on land that has been in my family for generations. Instead of the 12 expected for Thanksgiving dinner, there were only eight as first our son-in-law Louis in Montreal tested positive for Covid (grandchildren Vivi and James had been sick with it from preschool) and the next day Ellie came down with Covid, so they had to cancel—so disappointing for everyone. We were in Sunderland, Vermont. It is a house with a small farm where daughter **Annie** and son-in-law **Sooner** (recuperating from a bad case of chicken pox) were housesitting and taking care of chickens, sheep, dogs, and cats. The dogs who live there are Goose and Cuzco -- real characters -- and the other dog was Lola, **Annie** and **Sooner's**. With a young German Shepherd and a young Lab playing all of the time, you had to be a dog lover

## Personals (cont.) by Pat Oakes

to enjoy life in this house. Two cats, Mookie, and Pip liked attention but spent most of their time staying away the dogs. **Beth Gleason** came from Maine and joined us in the celebration. We also had my cousin **Charlie** up from Providence and **Sooner's** mom, **Clemma Dawson**, who lives nearby. At the end of our trip, **Reuel** flew out of Newark, and I took the train from the airport station to Washington, DC. I met with **Tim Tutt**, former pastor of United Christian, to catch up and to talk with him about his work as the director of the Briggs Center for Faith and Action. Without going into detail, the Briggs Center has had a close relationship over the years with the church where **Tim** was the senior pastor until last spring. We talked about the Center's work providing immigration legal services, ESOL classes, and hospitality to people new to this country, as well as having a history providing services to various groups. I was thinking perhaps hearing about what is basically a church-founded organization might help us think creatively about our future mission. I also visited First Congregational Church in downtown Washington, a church that redeveloped in place in ways that are similar to what we are working toward doing. They have the first two floors of the building, with the rest being separately owned office space. I spent several hours with the building manager, who also was part of the redevelopment process, touring the church and learning about what they did, what worked, and what they would do differently. The National Christmas tree blew over a few blocks away the night before I visited the church, so walking around Washington was quite the chilly adventure!



11/23/23 Becky, Annie, and Clemma putting marshmallows on the sweet potatoes.



11/23/23 Becky, Beth Gleason, and Annie sharing a hug



11/23/23 Reuel Nash (dubbed by Beth Gleason as CDC—Chef de Cuisine) setting up the buffet for Thanksgiving dinner

## History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

**T**his is a treasure that **Mel** and I found when we were down searching through the archives several months ago. This entry is not completely edited or fully proofed, but we think that there are folks among our readership who might be able to help us with names, spelling, and places. **Rev. John Towery** compiled this album of slides which he took during his Austin ministry which was from 1959-1989. This is truly a trip down memory lane—take a while to enjoy these “blasts from the past.” Do let Mel know if you have some information. He can be reached at [oakes@physics.utexas.edu](mailto:oakes@physics.utexas.edu) or call him at (512) 964-1423

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/OldChurchSlides.html>

**Rev. John Towery** entry in the church history site

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/JohnChesleyTowery.html>