

THE VISITOR

December 2024

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, Interim Pastor

During my morning walks, I've been immersed in **Angela Merkel's** memoir, [Freedom](#), where she recounts her formative years growing up in East Germany as the daughter of a pastor. Her vivid memories of life before the Berlin Wall starkly divided east from west provide a compelling lens into a world shaped by restrictions, challenges, and resilience. As **Merkel** reflects on her experiences in high school under an oppressive regime, I am struck by her ability to navigate such adversity with an enduring commitment to her values and an unshakable hope for a better future.

Her story has prompted me to prayerfully consider how we, as people of faith, move forward in a state and country increasingly at odds with what I understand to be our shared commitment to democracy. Much like **Merkel** found her way through the challenges of her time, we are called to maintain our spiritual equilibrium as we face constant threats to human dignity and rights.

Even in moments of discouragement, **Merkel's** journey reminds us that glimmers of hope can be found in persistence, courage, and faith. As we gather as a church community, may we be inspired by her example to work together for justice, leaning on one another and our shared faith to guide us. Let us hold fast to the vision of flourishing for all people, even when the road feels uncertain, and trust that God's love and justice will sustain us.

In the stillness of an early morning walk, I captured this serene image of a white heron, which offers a visual reminder of the balance we seek in our lives and faith. During this busy month of Christmas preparations, as we juggle the demands of the season, this moment of calm reminds me of the peace and beauty God offers us, even in the midst of our busyness. The heron's quiet presence invites us to pause, reflect, and find grounding in the hope and joy of this Advent season.

Blessings to all of you,
Ginny



December Visitor Deadline January 24, 2025

Church Leadership

Trustee's Chair	Bill Campbell
Deacon's Chair	Open
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
Newsletter Personals Editor	Pat Oakes
Member-at-Large	Bill Beardall
Pastor	Ginny Brown Daniel
Dir. of Online Ministries	Serge Martinez
Director of Music	Laura Martin

Personals by Pat Oakes

Sisters, **Cheryl Appel** and **Debbie Knowlton**, long-time members of the CCA who live out of state, thoroughly enjoyed their weeklong visit to Austin in mid-November. **Debbie** and **Cheryl** write, “The highlight of our trip was visiting with our brother, **Gregg**, from Kerrville, as well as with old friends from the CCA. It meant so much to us to be able to chat with people, get caught up, and fondly reminisce about good times shared together. We were blown away by the warm welcome we received from everyone during our visits. We started out the week by visiting with **Mary Blackstock**, wife of life-long CCA member, the late **Dr. Matt Blackstock**. Although, sadly, **Mary** (98) is affected by advanced dementia and has limited conversational ability, she graciously welcomed us to sit with her for a while as she ate her dinner at her Brookdale home, as we chatted and laughed together. Next, we had a delightful lunch with **Fran** and **Rambie Briggs**, dear friends of ours from when we were growing up in the CCA decades ago. They report that their daughter, **Serenity** is doing well, and has exchanged commitment rings with her boyfriend, **Shawn**. Also, their son, Jonathan, continues to thrive in his job at the Back Bay Mission. We were blessed to meet-up with **Nodie Murphy** via Zoom, and offer our support as she faces the upcoming anniversaries of **Dennis’** birthday this month and his death in December. She reports that her health is improving, but she is still getting settled, as she transitions to her new life in San Antonio at the home of her daughter, **Sarah**, and family. We were also thrilled to be able to visit with **Pat** and **Mel Oakes**, who had us over twice for lunch. We felt spoiled! While there, we had the opportunity to view old photos of the CCA (circa 1960-80) from when we were growing up in the church and **Pat** and **Mel** were delighted to have their input. Next, we had a terrific visit with **Stephen Russell** and his husband, **Scott Neely**, who graciously hosted us at their beautifully—renovated and decorated new home for dinner. We also enjoyed the grand tour they gave us! Finally, we had a wonderful visit with **Jaime Hadley**, at the Waterloo Ice House Restaurant, and learned about a cool art museum he toured during a recent business trip to St. Louis. On Sunday, we were pleased to be able to attend the CCA church service in person! It was a heartfelt homecoming. We were excited to finally meet Pastor **Ginny** in person, see new faces in the congregation, and reconnect with long-time friends, including **Dave**, **Sara**, and **Mike Ross**, who have

been friends with our family since the 1960’s (!), **Pam Tucker**, **Reuel** and **Liz Nash**, and others. We were also touched by the stunning musical worship gifts presented by the very talented trio/choir. We would like everyone at the CCA to know how much we enjoyed and appreciated their kind hospitality, support and good wishes throughout our trip to Austin this past week. God bless you all.”



11/14/24 Debbie Appel-Knowlton with Mary Blackstock (widow of the late Matt Blackstock). Mary turned 98 on Nov. 5th



11/15/24 Cheryl Appel and her sister Debbie Appel-Knowlton with Fran and Rambie Briggs who met for lunch at a Mexican restaurant in Cedar Park

Photos cont. on next page

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



11/17/24 Folks enjoying visiting with Debbie and Cheryl Appel--back l-r Stephen Russell, Lucy Erda, Lynn Chavarria, Pam Tucker, Dave Ross, Mel Oakes, Michael Ross, Ginny Brown Daniel, front--Pat Oakes, Debbie Appel, Cheryl Appel, Sara Ross, Barbara Burnham



10/24/24 Lauren and Jamie Adams with Kerry Manning, widow of Michael

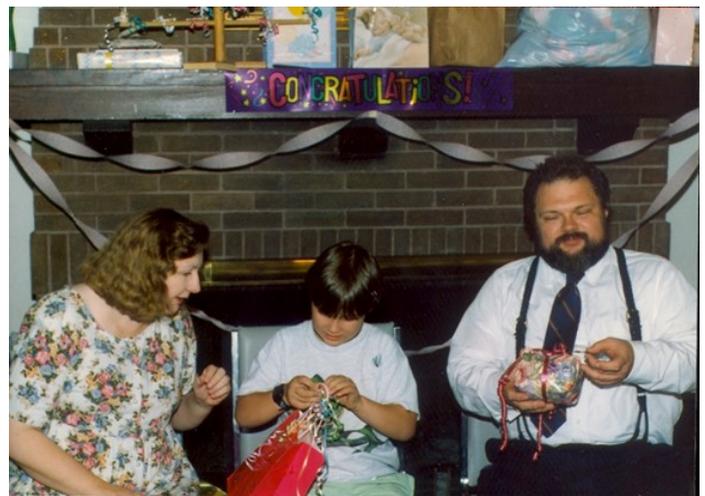


11/17/24 Stephen Russell, Cheryl Appel and Debbie Appel-Knowlton



11/24/24 Jamie Adams and his sister Julia talking with Pat Oakes at the reception at Jamie's home after the service

We are sad to report that former member **Michael Adams** died from complications of diabetes on Nov. 13, 2024 — the day after his 74th birthday. For nearly 20 years **Michael** was very active in the church and especially in the Christian education programs at CCA. **Michael** became a member of Saint Francis Anglican Church about 20 years ago, but stayed in touch with those of us who knew him well. He was an avid life-long reader and enjoyed learning and sharing what he learned. He worked as a home-health nurse for many years for children on ventilators and was someone who made connections with his patients and their families. He is survived by his wife **Kerry Manning**, son **Jamie**, daughter **Julia**, and four grandchildren.



6/14/94 Baby shower for the Adams/Manning family l-r Kerry, Jamie, and Michael (Julia on the way)—Michael was known for his suspenders!!!

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes

Andrea Haksoon Low reports, "Paul has recuperated well from his heart ablation surgery. To celebrate, we attended the Asian Family Support Services of Austin Silk Road Gala. I wasn't too fond of the art in the silent auction and I did not bid, but a wandering event photographer snapped a pic while we were standing there. I attended the NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Texas annual conference in El Paso the first weekend of November. It was the 40th anniversary of the Texas affiliate and the first time we held an annual conference in El Paso. While I had met many of the board members, staff, and volunteers throughout the state in the past few years, I was delighted to meet quite a few elected officials, especially judges, who are leading innovative and effective programs in El Paso County. Judge **Robert Anchondo** of the DWI Drug Court, County Criminal Court #2, presented a session on co-occurring disorders among the justice-involved (45% of people arrested for DWI have more than one mental health condition and/or substance use disorder). Other panelists from Bexar County gave an impressive and compelling presentation on the promise of individualized diversion and jail—based competency restoration programs. So different from "war on drugs/just say no/increase the drinking age or lose highway funds" when I started my career in law."



11/9/24 Andrea (center) with fellow NAMI Texas board member Commissioner David Stout and NAMI El Paso Program manager Alejandra Valdez, right



11/2/24 Andrea Haksoon Low and her husband Paul Toyazaki enjoyed the Asian Silk Road Gala



11/10/24 Paul and Andrea love being tourists!!!

Don Miles shares, "Things are going very well for me here in Missouri. I had a booth at the national convention of Hispanic Chambers of Commerce in Kansas City earlier this fall. I was joined by my son **Richard** and his wife, **Phoebe**. In mid—October, I led a four-city history tour in Mexico. That cannon I'm standing next to was in the woods 20 years ago when I had to climb up "Sheep's Hill" in Orizaba to get there. Now, there's a cable-car carrying folks up to the top. We spent a couple of nights in a hidden town the invading French army didn't know about in the 1860's - Tlacotalpan - where

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

I ordered that giant shrimp cocktail (in the picture) for just \$1.80 in U.S. money. The sizes were: Small, Medium, and "Change-Your-Life!" I'm re-writing my 2012 historical novel down to a sixth grade reading level to be aimed at elementary school readers. Publication will most likely be in the fall of 2026. Just 18 months now, until I turn 90!"



10/17/24 Don enjoyed a giant shrimp cocktail for just \$1.80 in Tlacotalpan



10/7/24 Don Miles in Kansas City at the national convention of Hispanic Chambers of Commerce earlier this fall--shown with his son Richard and his wife

Richard Jackson and **Mary Sinclair** love to travel. **Mary** writes, "**Richard** and I were in São Paulo, Brazil earlier this month, where **Richard** was presenting at a conference on carbon capture. He'll be 80 in February but is still working more often than not! We had a few days holiday in Paraty on the east coast of Brazil before **Richard** left to go home and I left for Argentina to spend the rest of November with my cousin who has a farm near Cordoba. Part of our time together was spent with friends at an ecotourism estancia in the mountains, where we rode beautiful Peruvian horses up and down the mountains, all day long. I ache a little more than I used to do! I go back home (Heidelberg, Ontario, Canada) on December 3rd."



10/19/24 Don Miles in Orizaba, Mexico



11/24 The beautiful ecotourism estancia where Mary Sinclair enjoyed riding

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



11/24 Mary Sinclair and Richard Jackson in Paraty, Brazil



11/24 Mary riding in Argentina

It was wonderful to see **Madeleine** (aka **Marilyn**) **Vaché** (who brought the uplifting Flowering of the Cross tradition to us many years ago) here in Austin at church on Sunday, Nov. 24th. She says, "I am a member of New London Friends Meeting in Connecticut, and an affiliate of another meeting in Virginia. In 2021 I experienced a 'leading' or call to wear plain dress, and in 2023 another call to educate Friends and others about the harms of the national online sex offense registry. I'd be open to giving a Zoom presentation on that to any interested church

folks. I stay busy with that, with visits to my daughter **Olivia** and her husband and my granddaughter in Massachusetts, and with my beau, another New England Quaker. I was in town for the memorial service for a dear friend and co-worker, psychologist **Elayne Lansford**, held on the family ranch in Leander where she grew up. Hers was a life well lived, to quote **Bill Beardall**. It was good to see him and many others this week."



11/24/24 Marilyn Vaché (aka Madeleine) visited with the congregation Sunday



11/24/24 It was a joy to have Marilyn Vaché with us on the Sunday before Thanksgiving--Amy Harris, Marilyn (aka Madeleine), Bill Beardall, Liz Nash, Sarah Darter, and Kay Pruett

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes

It has been a long time since members of the congregation got together for a field trip—other than the Equal Justice Center annual fund-raiser. But that changed on Sunday evening, November 24th. **CJ Wood** put together this masterful review.

Conclave

Suspenseful. Mysterious. Intriguing.

Based on book **Conclave** by British writer **Robert Harris** released in 2016. Cardinal **Lawrence** is tasked with one of the world's most secretive and ancient events -- participating in the selection of a new pope. Surrounded by powerful religious leaders in the halls of the Vatican, he soon uncovers a trail of deep secrets that could shake the very foundation of the Roman Catholic Church.

Movie Reviews



Liz Definitely for the movie and for our group that went. Such a good evening. "Conclave" is thought provoking about our faith and who we are called to be as Christ's body, as well as being a really suspenseful story.

Carolyn

Pay attention to the homily given by Cardinal **Lawrence** at the beginning of the Conclave. It contains a clue to the surprise ending! And the tensions: race, language, world politics, the economy. WOW! As the scene plays out over several days and issues arise, it caused me to reflect on the nature of secrets. Which should be kept and which should be shared.

Andrea

The dynamics among the Europeans, US Americans, Latin Americans, and Africans were nuanced and complex. Not just the cardinals. Also the nuns serving the cardinals and the nuns as weaponized pawns of the cardinals. The American fear of the illiberal global south and the European fear of the decolonized global south. It's mind boggling the more I think about it.

Kay

First reaction was that it was just a good movie. Then I started processing how I relate to each one of the characters. There is a lot to think about this movie.

Definitely



Lucy

I figured it was going to be a documentary type of film. I was happily wrong and may go and see it again.

CJ



The casting and acting is superb. So many nuances. Islamophobia. Racism. Homophobia. Toxic Masculinity. Classism. North vs South. East vs West. Yet humility, compassion, humanity, and servant leadership. The church is reflected in the diversity and the messiness of being human. Secrets. Secrets. Secrets. And even more Secrets! No one predicts the ending.



11/24/24 Everyone in the group enjoyed the movie "Conclave" at the Westgate Theater--l-r-- Pastor Ginny Brown Daniel, Lucy Erda, Carolyn Thompson, Kay Pruett, Reuel and Liz Nash, Nikki Stahl (association minister), Enid and Jim Ross, CJ Wood

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Memories of Christmases Past!



12/13/76 German themed Christmas potluck supper at the church--Dennis Schneider, back left, Debbie and Cheryl Appel, lower right, Doyal Pinkard holding a gingerbread house, Sarah Oakes, lower left, Billie Bess Sastrup, center back



12/13/76 German themed Christmas potluck supper at the church--Cheryl Appel, Hildegard Everett, Mardie Oakes, and Vic Appel



12/16/89 Church Christmas decorating party—1989 Ned and Dennis Murphy, Setsuko Kaneda, and Garry Cole

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



12/18/1994 The Joyful Noise Band with Nodie Murphy, flute, Craig Barrett, horn, Pat Oakes, piano, Rambie Briggs, accordion



12/25/94 Beth Oakes, Will Taylor, Katie Phillips, Florence Castle--Christmas quartet at church



12/22/1995 Joyful Noise Band--Craig Barrett, Whitney Barrett, Rambie Briggs, Ben White, Pat Oakes, Sara Ross, Dave Ross, Andy Ross?

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



12/17/04 Advent service at church--l-r Tom VandeStadt, Liz Nash, Matt Blackstock, Graylin Grissett, Ben White, Dave and Sara Ross, John Towery, Mel Oakes, Cathy Hubbs, Stella Morrison



12/11/07 John Goff helping his daughter Megan with an art project--a ball to hang on the tree



12/11/07 Giovanni and Stella Fracasso with their mom Paula (now known as Serenity) making Christmas ornaments at the church Advent party

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



12/1/07 The church pizza and decorating party--Alex VandeStadt, Emily Howicz and Katie Lemley, Cameron and Megan Goff, Becky Nash



12/16/18 A view of the church just before the candlelight carol service