

THE VISITOR

January 2023

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Amelia Fulbright, Transitional Pastor



Change Is Not a Punishment

*“I do not understand the mystery of grace --
only that it meets us where we are
and does not leave us where it found us.”*

— Anne Lamott

I have a confession to make: Change is hard for me. That may be hard for you to believe since I talk about it an awful lot about it as a transitional pastor. Maybe you even are tired of hearing about change and transition from me! (It’s okay; you can be honest.) But it’s true that I don’t particularly *like change*.

Don’t get me wrong—I love novelty, newness, and adventure, but the actual process of making big changes in my life can fill me with dread. Sometimes even small changes in my routines and rituals can be unsettling.

When I was in my mid-twenties, I needed to go on a special diet to address some health issues I was having. Basically, I needed to cut out all processed sugars and even limit natural ones. To make a long convoluted story short, I spent somewhere between 2-3 years reading up on potential low-carbohydrate diets, making small changes here and there, and imagining what it would be like to eat differently. I imagined how it would change my grocery shopping, my food preparation, even what I would order at some of my favorite restaurants. I had to visualize the change long before I was able to enact it. Finally, after several years of mental preparation, I chose a diet (recommended by my acupuncturist) and determined to begin it during the following January. It also happened to be the same January that I was enrolled in a seminary course on “Ministry and Addiction,” a class about practicing ministry alongside folks struggling with addiction and recovery. As part of the class, we seminarians were invited to sit in on outpatient twelve step groups at Seton Shoal Creek. What a powerful experience it was to journey, step by step, with others choosing to utterly transform their habits and dependencies! As is often the case in ministry, I suspect I received more from listening to and learning from the courageous members of my group than I actually offered in return. Their discipline inspired me to make the necessary dietary changes to rebalance my inner biome and put me on a path to better health.

Sometimes change can feel like a punishment, especially if it’s thrust upon us in difficult circumstances. Sometimes we worry that we won’t have what it takes to live and thrive in a new normal. Sometimes we worry that we will become obsolete or unappreciated in the new reality. Maybe we fear that we will be discarded, like cell phones, for newer, faster models.

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I don't know exactly where Spirit is leading CCA, but I do trust that God has no intention of leaving any of us behind, unless we opt out of our own accord (free will and all). I feel the same as your pastor: As long as I have the privilege of being with you on this journey, my desire is to bring everyone along. **None will be abandoned or discarded; everyone has a place and a purpose in our shared future.**

I can't promise that we won't need to make changes or try new things, because that's not what God promises to us. But I *can* promise you that the changes will be for our collective well being. *Change is not a punishment*; it is an opportunity to journey deeper into wholeness. I can testify that I've already been changed by our time together; who I am as a minister has been enlarged and expanded by being with you.

With love,

Pastor Amelia

February Visitor Deadline January 27, 2023

Church Leadership

Trustee's Chair	Kevin Dietz
Deacon's Chair	Jen Howicz
Outreach Coordinator	Whit Bodman
Moderator	Joy Penticuff
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

Our church family suffered an immeasurable loss on Sunday, December 4, 2022, with the sudden death of **Dennis Murphy** (81) at his home in Round Rock of a heart attack. **Dennis** and his wife **Nodie** moved to the Austin area in 1980 from Des Moines, Iowa, and soon found their way to the Congregational Church of Austin. They and their 2 children (**Sarah** and **Seth**) soon became an integral part of the church. Over the years **Dennis** was a faithful member of the choir and served in almost every office available at the church except pastor. He had an incredible gift of making everyone with whom he was involved feel as if they were very, very special. He stayed in touch with so many folks—both young and old. He had a wonderful sense of humor and enjoyed being around people. During prayer time he would often lift the folks that he met at the food pantry in Round Rock and ask for prayers that they would find the help they needed—and he often provided that help himself. Understandably, **Nodie** is still struggling to come to grips with what has happened. **Sarah** (who lives in San Antonio with her family), **Seth** (who lives in the Austin area) and Ned (also called **Ben** from his time in the military and who lives in the Minneapolis area with his family) came immediately. **Dennis** had made advance plans for a green burial which took place at Our Lady of the Rosary Cemetery in Georgetown. It was attended by family members and a few close friends on Feb. 8. There will be a larger celebration of his life early in 2023. **Seth** has been a rock of support for his mom and now her siblings will be coming for several weeks at a time to stay with her until a decision is made about where she will live. To learn more about Dennis, go to:

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/MensBookClub/DennisEMurphy.html>

The **Dennis and Norma Jane Murphy** Endowed Scholarship at Huston-Tillotson University has been set up by **Rambie and Fran Briggs, Dave and Sara Ross, and Mel and Pat Oakes.**

To donate, go to:

https://host.nxt.blackbaud.com/donor-form/?svcid=renxt&formId=cdfb045f-de8b-4d66-8e7e-626c9c640fbd&envid=p-VS7GSLjfw0CKzC3Xu1K0_Q&zone=usa



11/13/11 Birthday boy Dennis Murphy at his surprise 70th birthday celebration at church



12/8/22 Amy Harris played the violin and Pastor Amelia led the outdoor service—seated, Tom (Nodie's brother) and Julie Nice

The congregation celebrated the marriage of **Britt and Radhika Hicks** with cake and presents on Sunday, Dec. 4, during coffee hour after church.



12/4/22 Joy Penticuff, Jaime Hadley, and Ann Locasio cheering the newlyweds--Radhika and Britt Hicks

Personals
by Pat Oakes



12/4/22 Britt and Radhika Hicks cutting their beautiful cake at church (Photo credit to Sara Ross)

(Rev. **Towery** was the pastor of the church from 1959 -1989) who live in Georgetown and environs. The music was lovely (led by **Laura Martin**), the service included readings by Pastor **Amelia** and members, and the traditional singing of "Stille Nacht" with the first verse being sung in German as many early members of the church were from German families. Folks were able to visit and enjoy refreshments in the fellowship hall after the service.



12/18/22 The Towery clan at the traditional candlelight/carol service at the church--Front pew, left to right--Ricky and Monica Masters and daughter Agnes (a.k.a. A.J.--sister Clara was at a cheer practice), Mary (Towery) and Danny Masters; middle pew--Ches and Maggie Towery, KC, Elizabeth, Benjamin, and Kendra Towery; 3rd pew--far right Cole and Krystal Towery McMahon--expecting in February

Nathan Leach led several Sunday discussions at 10 a.m. on Revelations. The multi-generational Sunday school class now meets in the new location on the ground floor in the room where the nursery was. The nursery group now meets upstairs on the 2nd floor.



12/4/22 Nathan Leach had a good turnout for his class on Revelations--Nathan, Sara Ross, Michael Ross, Radhika Hicks, Jonathan Zercher, Joy Penticuff, Sidney Ables, Dave Ross, and Bill Beardall



12/18/22 Barbara Burnham reading some scripture for the candlelight service

The annual candlelight carol service was held at the church on Sunday evening, December 18th. Many thanks to **Jaime Hadley** who once again took on the task of decorating the window sills with candles. In addition to members we see often, there were 13 family members from the extended **Towery** family representing 3 more generations of **Towery's**

Photos cont. on the next page

by Pat Oakes



12/18/22 Candlelight service with the congregation singing "Stille Nacht"

The candlelight carol service was enjoyed by folks on-line, too. The **Dierksen's** sent photos from their home in Oswego, NY—not too far from Syracuse. On New Year's Day the four of them took a hike at the Sterling Natural Center in Sterling, NY. They also enjoyed seeing ice shelves on Lake Ontario.



12/18/22 The Dirksen's were on-line and joined us from Oswego, NY

It took a while to catch up with **Debby Kohrt** and find out how her long-planned fall trip worked out. **Debby** says, "Last September, I traveled to Portugal with five friends (all nurses) on a Gate One Tours group. We started our tour in Porto which is known for their port wines and their cork trees that are used for many things including, of course, wine corks! On the second day, unfortunately, our friend **Jo Beth** fell off a curb and injured her foot. Long story short, I went to the hospital with her, and via x-ray we found she had a distal fifth metatarsal fracture. She flew home that Monday morning. It is hard to believe, but with the ER visit, x-ray, ortho consult, ortho shoe...her bill was \$226.00....socialized medicine on exhibit. While in Porto we met a high school classmate of mine, **Andy**, and his wife **Sydni** for a wonderful dinner! They have retired there and have lived in Porto for five years. After five nights in Porto, our tour bus drove us to Lisbon, a large city with much culture, known for their art, cathedrals and museums. We had a wonderful time....a lot of walking!"



12/18/29 Andy, Astrid and Faye Dierksen and their dog joined us for the carol service — Deek must have been asleep



9/22 Debby Kohrt with her high school friend Andy and his wife Sydni

Personals
by Pat Oakes



9/22 A view of the Douro River from an overlook in Porto, Portugal



9/22 Look for Debby Kohrt right in the middle of her tour group at the Monument of the Discoveries in Lisbon



9/22 Debby Kohrt (center) with her nurse friends at the overlook in Porto—her friend Jo Beth (to Debby's right) fell off the curb moments later, broke her foot, and ended up having to come back to the States

Beth Gleason reports from Maine, "I'd like to share that I'm going back to college full time starting in January to study culinary arts at southern Maine Community College. I'm thrilled! I will have an associate's degree in 2 years...I am pursuing my passion! I am also still staying in touch with UCC church life by doing pulpit supply every Sunday around churches in southern Maine. Finally, **Jaime** is coming to see me after Christmas so we will try to remember to send you a picture of us together in Boston!"

Jaime Hadley had a great visit with **Beth Gleason** in Boston—meeting up with **Beth** and her friend **Lynn** to go to a great production of the musical "SIXTH" about the six wives of Henry VIII. **Jaime** highly recommends "SIXTH." All of his flights went smoothly. They then adjourned to Buxton, Maine, where **Beth** lives. **Buxton** is about 20 minutes SW of Portland. One day **Beth** and **Jaime** visited the original L. L. Bean Store in Freeport, Maine. **Beth** and **Jaime** purchased their three New Year's Eve lobsters at a local grocery store in S. Portland, and brought them home for a feast. He was gone 10 days total and he had a terrific time.



9/22 Stacks of cork in a cork factory in Porto



12/31/22 Beth Gleason and Jaime Hadley post-lobster New Year's Eve binge

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



12/28/22 Beth Gleason and her friend Lynn met Jaime Hadley in Boston to see the musical "SIXTH"



12/31/22 Beth Gleason enjoying Maine lobster on New Year's Eve



12/31/22 Jaime enjoying Maine lobster for New Year's Eve in Maine

Mel and Pat Oakes knew they were going to see their daughter **Sarah** (Arlington, VA) during the Christmas holidays (that was planned months ago), but they ended up also seeing **Mardie** (San Francisco) and Beth (Iowa City). **Mel** had to have surgery for a malignant tumor in his bladder which was set for December 2nd. **Mardie** arrived on the 1st, all went well on the 2nd (he is doing fine—it was caught early!), but there were some unexpected glitches which prompted **Mardie** to stay a couple of days more than she had planned and **Beth** was able to come—even overlapping with **Mardie** for a few hours. After **Beth** left there were a few days until **Sarah** came. She was here long enough to go to the carol service, leaving for home on Christmas morning. **Mel and Pat** are beyond grateful that they were able to help out.



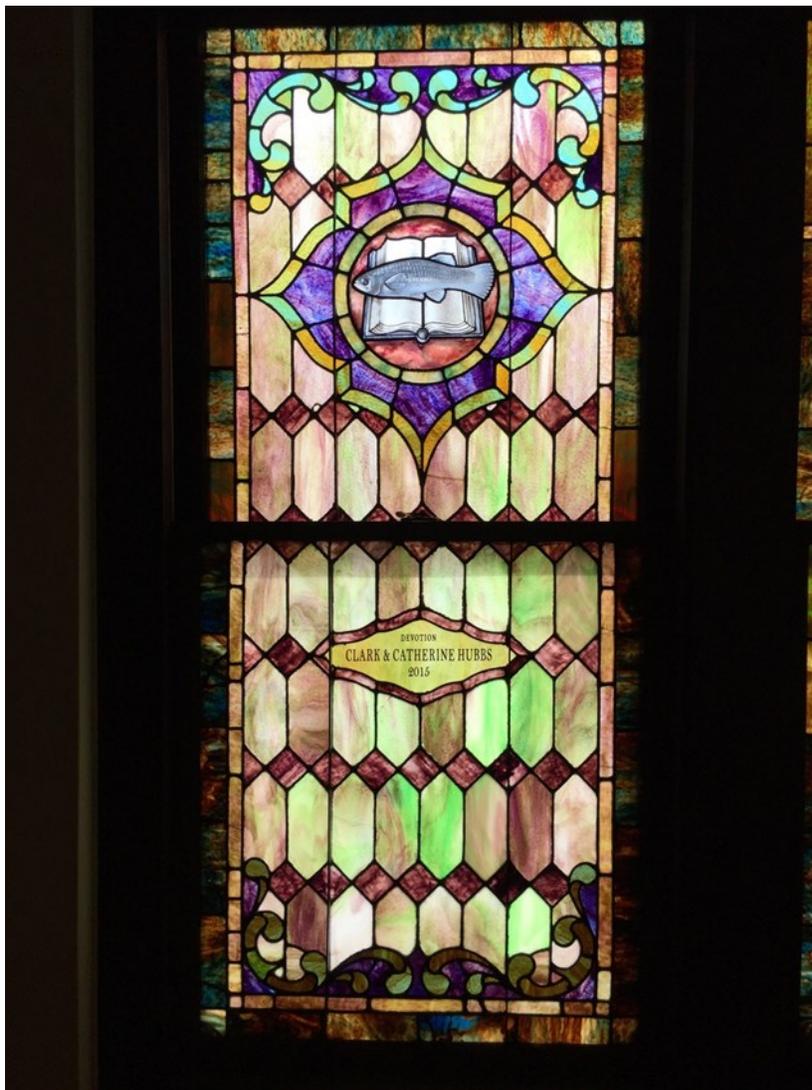
12/10/22 Pat, Mardie, Beth, and Mel Oakes enjoying a two-hour overlap with two of their daughters

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



10/20/22 Pat and Mel Oakes with daughter Sarah during her holiday visit

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes



3/6/16 This window dedicated to Clark and Cathy Hubbs was installed in 2015 and dedicated in 2016

"Photo credit to Dave Ross"

For some reason which neither Mel nor I can figure out, our daughter Mardie had a file on her computer entitled Dennis Murphy Videos dated March 3, 2016. She came across them and sent them to us. We realized they were taken by Dennis the Sunday that the church window was dedicated to Clark and Cathy Hubbs. There was one in particular that we thought would be good to share. The video shows the congregation singing one of Nodie's great songs during coffee hour. It has been her custom (and one of her great gifts) for many years to take a familiar tune and create words to go with it celebrating anniversaries, birthdays, etc. A few years later, Ruth Koenig (whose memorial service will be in late February) came up with the term for these celebrations — "being Nodied" Enjoy!

https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/Images-ChurchSite/ClarkAndCathyHubbs_files/HubbsWindowSongByNodie480.mov