

# THE VISITOR

January 2024

## The Congregational Church of Austin    United Church of Christ

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### Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, Interim Pastor

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I believe 2024 is going to be a great year! Maybe it's the black-eyed peas I ate New Year's Day or watching your willingness to be vulnerable with one another at our Visioning gatherings, I truly believe God is going to do great things with you, Congregational Church of Austin, UCC, in 2024! It's not going to be easy, and it may feel clunky as we navigate through this journey together, but I can see the potential of who God has created you to be for such a time as this.

Our theme during the Epiphany season will be, "**Illuminating Christ's Justice in Austin!**" That's how I see you, CCA! You have been illuminating Christ's Justice in bold and courageous ways throughout your history and you are carrying Christ's justice with you into your future. I want to reflect to you how amazing your presence has been as a small and mighty gathering of diverse neighbors intent on welcoming the abandoned and fighting against the powerful for the dignity of the most vulnerable.

But God is not through with you yet! God is creating a new thing within you as you illuminate Christ's Justice in West Campus and throughout Austin. For me, Christ's Justice reflects the wholeness of humanity and God's creation through equity in our thoughts and actions, which include dismantling our white supremacy. Each Sunday, we will look at the skills it takes to illuminate Christ's Justice.

We will also reflect on Christ's Justice with our Epiphany Book Study on Me and White Supremacy. This book is going to make you squirm, perhaps even getting upset with me wondering why we need to be reading this book right now. Your discomfort makes room for Christ's Justice to be transformed in you and me!

Who can predict what will happen in 2024 – to our nation in the presidential election as well as Austin. But one thing I know for sure: you, the Congregational Church of Austin, are here for a reason, which is to illuminate Christ's justice! And I am grateful to be your companion as we illuminate Christ's Justice in Austin together! Woohoo!!

**February's Visitor Deadline January 26, 2024**

## **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**

**O**n Sunday, December 10th, we were pleased to welcome a special visitor, **Dr. Robert Ceresa**, on the faculty at Huston-Tillotson in the political science department, speaking to the congregation on the second Sunday of Advent. He and several of his students are working closely with Central Texas Interfaith Dr. **Ceresa** celebrated our church's long-time connection and strong support of HT.



12/10/23 Dr. Robert Ceresa

The annual Christmas/candlelight carol service was held on Sunday, Dec. 17th, at 7:00 p.m. Look on YouTube for Congregational Church of Austin for that date and time and you will be able to enjoy seeing and hearing the service. As folks were walking up to the church that evening, they noticed that the UT tower was lit up with a huge number 1 and that a fabulous band was playing. It didn't take folks very long to figure out that the UT women's volleyball team had won the national championship and that folks were out on the mall celebrating with the UT band! Once inside the sanctuary we could hear a little of the music, coming from the mall, but much more from our trio and the choir. Our music director **Laura Martin** has been a choir member at University United Methodist Church, so she invited some of her friends there to come and sing with our group—at morning worship and for the candlelight service that day. The results were sublime. We were delighted to welcome several generations of the **Towery** family (coming in from Taylor, Round Rock,

and Georgetown) to the carol service. The **Towery** "kids" are the children of Rev. **John Towery** (pastor from 1959-1989) and his wife **Eleanor**. **John's** influence on the church remains strong to this day.



10/17/23 The UT women's volleyball team won the national championship, so the tower was lit, and the UT band was playing as we came to the candlelight service



12/17/23 Pastor Ginny greeting folks at the Christmas candlelight carol service--note the enlarged choir

Photos cont. on the next page

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



12/17/23 Warinda Harris reading the scripture at the Christmas candlelight carol service



12/17/23 Mary Towery Masters with Sara Ross after the candlelight service



12/17/23 Xitlali Hernandez-Geer walking down the aisle with Pastor Ginny and holding an angel from the creche



12/17/23 Ches Towery, his sister Mary Towery Masters, her husband Danny Masters, almost 1 year old Leanne, Krystal (Towery) and Cole McMahan with interim pastor Ginny Brown Daniel after the service

**Ann Locasio** reports, "Just finished my Storytelling 101 class which ended with a showcase. The Storytelling Showcase is like a final exam, but much more fun. Only four of the original ten students in the class presented a story. Some were on business trips, some possibly fled in terror at the thought of telling a story in public. I don't know for sure, but nothing could have kept me off that stage as my "ham gene", which usually lies dormant, really acted up that evening. I told the assembled guests at Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches about a time in the 1970s

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

when our family visited a snake farm in the town of Butanta, close to Sao Paulo, Brazil. I won't elaborate on the story because I don't want to trigger anyone. When I was finished telling it, the moderator asked, "Is anyone else checking for snakes under the table?"

**Sarah Darter** says of her family's Christmas celebration, "**Nikki Darter** cooked a first-class meal. Her birthday is December 25th. She turned 45. Husband **Aaron Jones** is on her right. That's me with silver hair looking like an old person. (Editorial note—**Sarah Darter** is in the middle with the beautiful silver hair) Then my grandchild **Cedric** and my daughter-in-law **Debbi** who is married to **Rikki Darter-Martin** who is asleep on the couch."



12/25/23 Sarah's son-in-law Aaron Jones, Nikki Darter, Sarah Darter, grandson Cedric, Sarah's daughter-in-law Debbi married to Rikki Darter-Martin

**Sarah Bentley**, who recently moved into Westminster here in Austin, shares, "I spent holidays with friends in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where I lived for 18 months. It's become like "a home away from home" for me. Such a joy to be greeted enthusiastically by so many who became special to me in a short time. I plan to go back at least twice a year, especially if we have another Texas summer like this last one!" That sounds like an excellent plan, **Sarah!**

Congratulations to **Joan Mueller** whose artwork appears in **Westminster Artists 2023**, an impressive collection created by 30 artists who are residents at Westminster here in Austin. **Joan's** piece is an abstract on p. 38, Untitled (center piece of a triptych) not dated, Oil 40" x 40." **Joan** has an MFA and painted professionally during most of the time she and Bill lived in California. Their apartment

is filled with many of her works. She spends much of her time going back and forth to husband Bill's room in the nursing section of Westminster.

**Pam Tucker** was delighted to have **Savanna** and **Harrison** home for the holidays. It is unbelievable that **Savanna** is already a senior at the University of Washington in Seattle and that **Harrison** is now a freshman at Arizona State in Tempe.



12/23 Sav, and long-time Austin friends Mattie, & Daryl in their leather jackets – Charlie's Angels!



12/24/23 Pam Tucker with Harrison and Savanna at church on the Sunday before Christmas

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



12/25/23 Christmas morning at the Tuckers--Savanna, Pam and Harrison

In mid-December, **Nodie Murphy** (who now lives in San Antonio with daughter **Sarah** and son-in-law **Larbi Sennour** and two of their kids **Dehbia** and **Ryan**) made a two-night, three-day trip by car to Houston where **Larbi's** brother and sister-in-law live. It had been a long time since **Nodie** had ventured so far from home. She had not been to Houston in several years, so there were lots of new things to see. **Nodie** was particularly interested in a meeting she went to with **Larbi's** sister-in-law and astonished at the mixture of English, French, and Arabic that filled the conversations. Over Christmas she was delighted to have a visit from her grandson **Randy Sennour** (also **Mel** and **Pat Oakes'** godson) and his partner **Maria Colby** who live in Jefferson Parish, LA. **Nodie's** son **Seth's** arrival from his home in Round Rock was delayed several days at Christmas as he was getting over the flu. He is glad to report that he is feeling much better. You can reach **Nodie** at 210-764-0201 (the home phone—just ask for Nodie if she does not answer) and her new address is 14430 Triple Crown Lane, San Antonio, TX 78248. Her e-mail is [nodienice@gmail.com](mailto:nodienice@gmail.com). She would love to hear from you.

**Mel** and **Pat Oakes'** family enjoyed a wonderful Zoom call on Dec. 23rd—everyone was there except for **Durham** (11) who was at his dad's that day. Daughter **Beth** and granddaughter **Emily**, a senior at Smith College, were just back from England where **Emily** had spent her senior fall semester (English major—perfect!) at the University of Bath—enjoying travels in the area—and some more travels when her mom came to visit on **Emily's** birthday

(Dec. 12th)—both arriving home in Iowa City on the 21st. Grandson **Ethan**, a junior at Stanford, and son-in-law **Eugene**, a Stanford alumnus and a very happy new hire at **Stanford** as Director of Finance & Operations in the Theater & Performance Studies department, were also home in Iowa City for the holidays. **Beth** and **Eugene** manage to see each other every two weeks or so as **Beth** is still teaching chamber music at the University of Iowa. There was a lot of catching up to do on Zoom and they enjoyed every minute. **Sarah** was here visiting her parents heading back to Arlington, VA, midday on Christmas—and **Mardie** arrived in time for a slightly late dinner on Christmas night. They missed each other by a few hours, but had seen each other for an afternoon's visit in Annapolis, MD, a few weeks ago.



12/23/23 The best Christmas present—A one hour family Zoom call--Mel, Mardie in SF, Ethan, Beth, Emily and Eugene in Iowa City, Sarah visiting her folks in Austin, and Pat

**Lynn Chavarria** had a great time at her 80th birthday party on Dec. 18 at the Austin Beerworks near Sprinkle, TX. Folks gathered from far and wide to celebrate the occasion. It was a bittersweet day for Lynn as she and her identical twin sister **Karen** threw big parties for their 50th, 60th, and 70th birthdays, but sadly **Karen** died several years ago. They were very close and, understandably, it has been a difficult adjustment for **Lynn** and her sister's kids.

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**Personals (cont.)**  
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12/18/23 Lynn Chavarria celebrated her 80th birthday in grand style at the Austin Beerworks near Sprinkle, TX — pictured is the cadre from the church — l-r Carolyn Thompson, Mel Oakes, Bill Beardall, Pat Oakes, Reuel Nash, Lynn Chavarria, Liz Nash, Barbara Burnham, Warinda Harris, and Joy Penticuff

## History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

**C**heck out this link to The Congregational Church of Austin, Church Description Booklet 1957-1958—just before the church called John Towery to be our pastor. We will be putting together a church profile in the coming months, so this will offer us some historical perspective.

<https://www.patandmeloakes.com/>