

THE VISITOR

January 2025

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, Interim Pastor

I wrote the following reflection on January 7 before I learned of the horrific fires raging through Los Angeles. It is shocking that only two weeks ago I drove through the Pacific Palisades area where the Getty Museum is located and now is in danger of being consumed by fire. May God's love and peace protect our neighbors in southern California especially the firefighters braving the fires in this dangerous time.

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a bit of time to rest and renew your spirits after a very busy Advent and Christmas season! My husband, **David**, and I flew out on Christmas morning for our adventure to Santa Barbara, California. I describe it as an adventure because neither of us had ever been there (we love to spend Christmas traveling to new places we've never been before). The weather, sunrises, food, and nourishing conversations did not disappoint! We rented electric bikes and rode along the coast with the ocean as our companion.



On our last day, we happened upon Gaviota State Park about 30 miles west of Santa Barbara, which included a secluded beach along a cliff of rocks. I leave the scientific term to **John Goff** and other scientists, but I marveled at God's creation so grand and mysterious to create this design. If you look at the center of the pic, you will see that I am standing in the middle of the circle. I found within myself a doxology of sorts arising from my spirit, praising God for the beauty of creation in all of our expressions.

My visit to Gaviota State Park was one such moment—a quiet, sacred encounter with creation. Standing in the center of a natural circle of rocks, I marveled at the intricate beauty of God's handiwork. That moment lifted my spirit and reminded me that awe and gratitude can arise even in the midst of life's challenges, fueling our hope and resilience for the work ahead.

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As we begin this new year, I encourage us all to seek these moments of wonder, whether in nature, relationships, or quiet reflection. Let them renew your spirit and inspire you to continue the work of love, justice, and peace. May the beauty we find in creation remind us that God's presence is with us always, sustaining and guiding us through whatever lies ahead. Happy New Year!

February 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

It is with great sorrow that we share the sudden passing of **Fran Briggs** on December 8th from a stroke. Even though **Fran** and **Rambie** moved out to Lago Vista (about 35 miles away) more than 30 years ago, they have continued to be a part of our church family. As the years have passed, we have seen them more on Zoom rather than in person. One event that brought many of us together for about ten years in a row was the meeting of the combined men's and women's book clubs each June for Poetry on the Lake at their home overlooking Lake Travis. **Fran** loved poetry, and was a poet herself, and she and **Rambie** were great hosts. **Rambie** shared that he and **Fran** had a wonderful last day together—they took a walk, played some board games, enjoyed good meals and each other's company — no indication that anything was amiss. The stroke occurred in the middle of the night. She died surrounded by family at Dell Medical Center after being helicoptered into Austin to the Dell Medical Center. A memorial service will be held on January 11th at 2 p.m., at Rolling Hills Community Church, 6201 Lohman Ford Rd. Lago Vista, TX. As **Fran** wished, inurnment will take place in the spring at the Briggs Family plot in the cemetery of Old Rock Baptist Church in Somerset, TX. Memorial contributions may be made to Back Bay Mission, 1012 Division Street, Biloxi, MS 39530. thebackbay-mission.org or to a charity of your choice.



5/24 Fran Briggs — 1940 - 2024

[Frances Lee Cooper Briggs
statesman-tx.newsmemory.com](http://statesman-tx.newsmemory.com)

There are plans to stream the service. Here is the link to the Rolling Hills Community church Facebook page. The link is currently active.

[https://www.facebook.com/RHCC4/Rolling Hills Community Church | Lago Vista TX](https://www.facebook.com/RHCC4/RollingHillsCommunityChurch|LagoVistaTX)

Many thanks to **Lynn Chavarria** and **Roberto Hernandez** who played big roles in beautifying the sanctuary for Christmas. **Lynn** created beautiful new blue paraments for the altar and **Roberto** created beautiful large gold and blue folded paper ornaments to hang.



12/24/24 Note the beautiful, folded blue and gold ornaments created by Roberto Hernandez hanging from the eaves of the sanctuary



12/24/24 Lynn Chavarria created the beautiful blue and gold paraments for the sanctuary for Advent

There was a beautiful and well-attended traditional candlelight lessons and carols service on December 22nd at 7 p.m. at the church. It was led by Rev. Dr. **Ginny Brown Daniel** with **Bill Beardall** as worship leader. The music was wonderful with an

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes

augmented choir and more musicians led by **Laura Martin**. Musicians/singers included **Abi Archey, Andres Ojeda, Nick Bennet, Jeannie Binder, Barbara Burnham, Lucy Erda, Sarah Darter, Amy Harris, Roberto Hernandez, Eric Horn, Lauren Horn, Ethel Morris, Sara Ross, Michael Ross, Jeremy Selvidge, Kenzie Slotted,** and **AV Villarreal**. It was great to see eight members of the **Towery family (John Towery** was minister of the church from 1959-1989 and family members live in the area).



12/22/24 Monica and Ricky Masters with their two daughters Clara and Agnes (known as AJ)-Krystal Towery McMahon (married now, but is Ches Towery's daughter), Ches Towery, Mary Towery Masters and her husband Danny — at the candlelight carol service

Sisters **Beth** and **Sarah Oakes** and their spouses and **Beth** and **Eugene's** kids **Emily** and **Ethan Buck** had a great evening in Tucson in late December with longtime friends from church **Stephen Russell** and **Scott Neeley** at their home there. They really enjoyed getting caught up over a delicious dinner.



12/29/24 Stephen Russell, Scott Neeley, Eugene Buck, Sarah Oakes, Beth Oakes, Emily Buck, Ethan Buck, and Joe Pierce in Tucson

John Goff, Gail Christeson and daughter **Megan Goff** traveled to Houston after Christmas to visit with son/brother **Cameron** and his wife **Amber** as well as their identical triplets(!) **Lelan, William** and **Bennett**. The whole family are doing great and settling into a good routine. The boys will be attending a day care soon, allowing mom and dad to get back into their work lives - she as a CPA and he as an internal medicine resident at Baylor College of Medicine.



12/27/24 John with Aunt Megan in a selfie with William



12/27/24 John with Lelan, Megan with William, Gail with Bennett

Photos cont. on next page

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



12/27/24 Gail reading a book with Bennett

Rev. **Shelby Nowland** (center of the 1st photo) has been called to serve as settled minister of St. Paul's UCC in Henderson, Minnesota. We are delighted for him and send him with our blessings.



12/15/24 The laying of hands as we bade farewell to the Rev. Shelby Nowland who has been called to lead his new church in Minnesota



12/24 Shelby Nowland with the selection committee at his new church--St. Paul's UCC in Henderson, MN

Liz Nash says, "**Nash and Rodgers families** met up in New York City after Christmas: **Liz, Reuel, Annie, Becky, Ellie, Louis,** and three kids **Vivi, James, and Henry (Huck)** - for four days for a very active visit. (Hard to imagine it wouldn't be with three young kids.) We celebrated **James'** third birthday, went ice skating at Bryant Park (**Liz** was probably the oldest person there skating or rather attempting to skate), went to see model trains at Grand Central Station, visited the Museum of Natural History, did lots of things in Central Park, went strolling through the Rockefeller Center area to see the Christmas sights, and just generally spent the whole time on the go at a kid's pace. We split up one day with **Ellie, Vivi,** and Aunts **Becky** and **Annie** going to the New York City Ballet Nutcracker, and **Reuel** and **Liz** taking **James** to the Central Park Zoo. **Annie** and **Becky** took an evening together to see the Rockettes. As I (**Liz**) write, the huge crowds that were gathering near us today are at Times Square waiting to ring in the New Year, but we picked up pizza and headed inside. **Liz** and **Reuel** will sleep well after everyone else leaves New Year's Day, and we're looking forward to having some fun outings in the next few days with **Whit** and **Betty Bodman** and with **Beth Gleason.**"



12/29/24 Becky Nash, Liz and Reuel Nash, Louis Rodgers with Vivi and James enjoying Manhattan just after Christmas

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Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



12/30/24 Louis Rodgers and son James and Reuel Nash with granddaughter Vivi Rodgers in NYC



12/30/24 Louis Rodgers and son James and Reuel Nash with granddaughter Vivi Rodgers in NYC



1/4/25 Whit and Betty Bodman (New Jersey) with Beth Gleason (Maine) and Liz and Reuel Nash ready to enjoy The Magic Flute at the Met

René Slataper shares, "I am still in Brooklyn and in the search and call process. I was leading services at St. Lydia's (ELCA) in Brooklyn before they called their interim, but have been doing pulpit supply all over the city and I have more planned in 2025 . I recently went up near Boston and preached at Congregational Church of Needham where Rev. **John Gage** leads. This past year I created websites for St. Lydia's, ChrysalisQ, and I will be launching a website soon for a Lilly Endowment Compelling Preaching Initiative. I've also been leading a preaching lab cohort for the Southern New England Conference called Project Proclaim and I finished up an Interreligious Leadership Cohort with TriFaith. I miss you all tons and I hope I can visit soon!" We would love to see you, too, **René!**



8/27/23 René Slataper at church before heading to NYC

Mel and Pat Oakes enjoyed a holiday visit from **Mel's** nephew **Stuart Oakes** and his husband **Jay Ruffner** who live in Cleveland, OH. **Jay**, an inveterate and excellent trip planner, decided that on their way driving from Vicksburg that it would be fun to meet **Pat** and **Mel** in Waco for an overnight to see some sights. Having driven right through Waco many times (actually the part of I-35 which is named **Jack Kultgen** Expressway—for **Liz Nash's** grandfather), **Pat** and **Mel** did not know what to expect. Most impressive was the Waco Mammoth National Monument, an amazing paleontological site discovered in 1978—the next day visiting the Mayborn Natural History Museum on the Baylor campus. **Stuart** and **Jay** came to Austin for several days and enjoyed a day trip to Blanco—and are now back in chilly Cleveland.

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Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



12/31/24 Mel, Jay, Stuart, and Pat by the Chisolm Trail monument by the old suspension bridge over the Brazos River in Waco

Andrea Haksoon Low reports, "In the past month, we celebrated my birthday, our anniversary, and Xmas quietly at home. However, we have had a busy holiday season - attended nine Christmas music performances, the Nutcracker, A Christmas Carol, and a few parties. Also the Trail of Lights Fun Run, which we try to do every year. I have noticed that Austinites (maybe most Texans?) don't go out in the rain, so it was not crowded, as it has been in other years."



12/7/24 Andrea Haksoon Low and her husband Pau Toyazaki at the Austin Trail of Lights



12/7/24 Andrea at the Austin Trail of Lights

We received word of the peaceful passing on December 31, 2024 (officially recorded as Jan. 1, 2025) at the age 103, of **Eunice Paul**, widow of Rev. **Robert Paul** (1918-92). They were a part of our church family between 1977 and 1987 when **Bob** was on the faculty at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. After **Bob** and **Eunice** returned home to England they stayed in touch with us here in Austin through the Visitor. **Pat** and **Mel Oakes** were able to visit Eunice several times in Leatherhead, Surrey. There was a pulpit exchange arranged by the **Pauls** — **John** and **Eleanor** Towery went to Leatherhead and Rev. **Dean Tapley**, his wife, **Lydia** (daughter of **Bob** and **Eunice**) and their sons, **Nathaniel** and **Joshua**, came to Austin for several months. **Dean** and **Lydia** divorced a number of years ago. **Lydia** says of her mother, "She has had a wonderful life, born in Manchester, head girl at Withington Girls School, and a student at Oxford, during the war, where she met my father. They lived in Surrey, in Switzerland, and the USA. They travelled around the world. She was a talented linguist, who translated several published books. She was also my father's "right hand woman", typing/editing his numerous books. They returned to the U.K. in 1987, and, since the death of my father in 1992, she and I have had many adventures. She inspired my crafting; always supporting and encouraging me. She has knitted, crocheted, cross stitched, needle crafted and made more felted scarves and bags to support my enterprises. She was/is a grandmother to five lovely boys, of whom she was immensely proud, and the great-grandmother to seven, whose growth and adventures she avidly followed and supported." **Lydia** also received word of the sudden passing of **Dean Tapley** on New Year's Day, also.

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



9/28/21 Eunice Paul celebrated her 100th birthday at her home in Leatherhead, England -- she received a signed card from the Queen



5/24/1987 Eunice and Bob Paul with their daughter Lydia Tapley at CCoA

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

For about ten years (I think the pandemic stopped the gatherings) the men's and women's book clubs were invited to a joint get-together each June to share poetry at the lake at Rambie and Fran Briggs' home on Lake Travis in Lago Vista. The Briggses provided barbecue, and the rest of the folks brought potluck items. I seem to be missing pictures from June 2013—I may have been out of town.



6/12/09 Poetry at the lake--Fran Briggs, Sara Ross, ?, Ben White, Bill Briggs, Michael Ross, Matt Blackstock, Dave Ross, Rambie Briggs, Mel Oakes



6/19/10 Poetry at the lake with Barbara Burnham, Sara Ross, and Cathy Hubbs at the Briggs' home



6/19/10 Poetry at the lake at the Briggs' home -- Betty Bodman, Nodie Murphy, Barbara Burnham, Sara Ross, Cathy Hubbs, and Ben White



6/19/10 Poetry reading at the Briggs' home on Lake Travis-- Betty Bodman, Nodie Murphy, Rambie Briggs (his crutches), Barbara Burnham, Sara Ross, Cathy Hubbs

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History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



6/4/11 Poetry on the Lake at Fran and Rambie's -- Sara R., Barbara B., Chester Rosson, Rambie, Fran, Dave R., Dennis, Bill Briggs, Mathis, and Mel



6/9/12 A good group at Poetry on the Lake at the Briggs' home on Lake Travis—Fran Briggs, ?, Michael and Joy Hall, Rambie's cousin Bill Briggs, Katie Lemley, Mel Oakes, Dave Ross, Greg Futch, Bill and Betty Phillips, Geneva Ross, Sara Ross, Rambie Briggs, Cathy Hubbs, ?



6/7/2014 Fran and Rambie Briggs hosted Poetry on the Lake at their Lago Vista home--here with Jeff and Stelli Munnis, and Bill Briggs



6/4/16 Poetry at the Lake -- Chester Rosson, Ruth Koenig, Sara Ross, Michael Hall, Susan Hall

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History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



6/4/16 Poetry at the Lake--Paula, Rambie, Giovanni, Fran, and Pat—time for lunch!!



6/10/17 Poetry at the Lake with Chester Rosson, Giovanni Fracasso (a lover of poetry like his grandmother), Fran Briggs, Dave Ross



6/9/18 Poetry at the Lake-Fran Briggs, Dennis and Nodie Murphy



6/8/19 Poetry at the Lake at the Briggses -- Jim Vick, Fran and Rambie Briggs, Dennis Murphy, Bill Briggs, and Dave Ross



6/8/19 Poetry at the Lake at the Briggses -- Jim Vick (front center), Fran and Rambie Briggs, Dennis Murphy, Bill Briggs, Dave Ross, Pat Oakes, Lynne Lemley, Sara Ross, Carolyn Thompson, ? and Michael Hall, Barbara Burnham