

THE VISITOR

November 2025

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

408 West 23rd St. Austin, Texas 78705-5214
(512) 472-2370

E-mail: office@congregationalchurchofaustin.org

Web site: congregationalchurchofaustin.org

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Ginny Brown Daniel, Interim Pastor

When we read in the Gospel of Luke 4:16–21 how Jesus entered the synagogue, announced good news to the poor, and proclaimed freedom for the oppressed, we are reminded that God’s heart is for those who struggle and are vulnerable. In that same spirit, we now witness a pressing reality: the federal government shutdown has placed the monthly benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in jeopardy. Although recipients received their October benefits on schedule, many states are warning that if funding remains stalled, November SNAP benefits may not be issued—leaving millions dependent on this lifeline without it.

This moment calls us to consider the question: who will fill the basket when the government’s provision falters? Just as Jesus asked his disciples to feed the five thousand (Gospel of John 6:1–14), our faith communities, neighborhood groups, businesses, and volunteers are being called to bring their lunch-baskets into the field. Across the nation, food banks and mobile meal providers are already facing extra pressure as SNAP delays loom. In our own city, the Central Texas Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, and grocery partners like H-E-B are stepping up with food drives, emergency distributions, and partnerships with local congregations to ensure that no table is left empty. What we once took for granted is now the very place where God invites us to embody compassion.

And yet, compassion must go hand in hand with justice. Our congregation knows this hunger firsthand. Among us are neighbors and families—including some of my own—who rely on SNAP to make ends meet, who know the difference a full pantry or an empty card can make. The story of the loaves and fishes reminds us that Jesus didn’t draw lines between those who give and those who receive; he gathered everyone, blessed what was offered, and made enough for all. In Austin, where the cost of living rises faster than wages, the church’s witness must be both tender and bold: to feed the hungry, yes—but also to demand a society where no one goes hungry in the first place. When we offer what we have and speak out for what is right, God still multiplies the loaves—turning our shared vulnerability into collective strength and abundance for all.

During the shutdown, our church will host a **Loaves and Fish Cabinet** in the kitchen—dedicated to non-perishable food that anyone may donate or take as needed. The cabinet will be clearly marked with a sign and kept completely anonymous, a small act of grace in the spirit of Jesus’ table where everyone is welcome. You are also invited to purchase an H-E-B gift card in lieu of food and place it inside the cabinet. Together, through the quiet exchange of generosity and need, we live out the miracle of enough—God’s abundance shared among us all.

December Visitor Deadline November 25,2025

Church Leadership

Trustee's Chair	Bill Campbell
Deacon's Chair	Roberto H. & Sarah D.
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	Michael Follis

Personals by Pat Oakes

It is not too early to start making plans for the holidays. **Lucy Erda** shares, "On Saturday, December 6th at 7:00 p.m., Tapestry Singers will hold our fall concert, entitled 'Sure on this Shining Night.' The concert will consist of several winter based songs. I would love to see all of your shining faces to share in this celebration of snow, winter, rest, and contemplation. The concert will be at Northwest Hills United Church. See you there!" Tickets for our December 6, 2025 concert, ***Sure On This Shining Night***, are now available online, at a discount of 20% off event-day prices. Please share this link widely and regularly with your family, friends, coworkers and acquaintances." <https://tickets.chorusconnection.com/tsawc/events/1642>

John Goff and **Gail Christeson** made lemonade out of the lemon of **Gail** being furloughed during the government shutdown. "**Gail Christeson** and **John Goff** took advantage of **Gail's** furlough during the government shutdown to see the Fall colors in SW Pennsylvania, along with two **Frank Lloyd Wright** houses: **Kentuck Knob**, a 1950's "Usonian" design home, and the ever-iconic **FallingWater**, built in the 1930's. **John** is a bit of a **Frank Lloyd Wright** enthusiast since taking a modern architecture class at Brown, as well as growing up in the presence of the Marin County Civic center (where **John's** mother worked for many years). **FallingWater** was on his bucket list; it did not disappoint! Near **Gail** and **John's** condo in Alexandria, Virginia, is another Usonian house - the **Pope-Leighey** house, which **John** visited with their daughter **Megan** earlier this year. It is a much more modest house than either of the other two, and a good example of **FLW's** interest toward the end of his career in designing homes for middle class families. In all things **FLW** wanted to design an "organic" architecture that blended with the natural environment, and you can easily see that in these photos



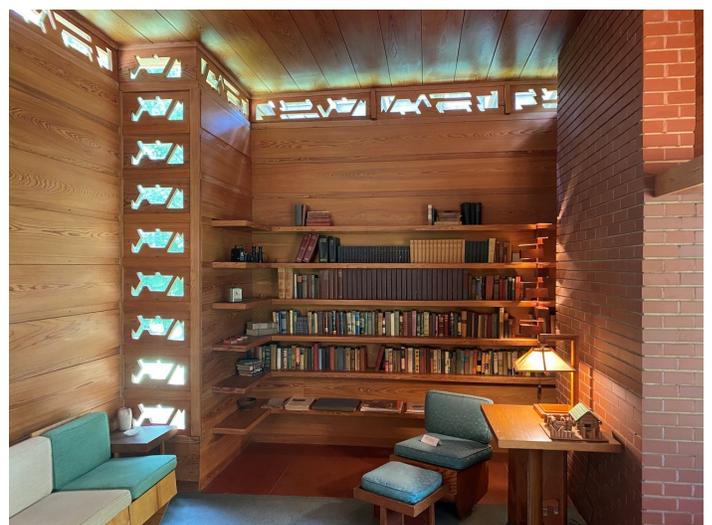
10/25 KentuckKnob house, exterior in Dunbar, PA



10/25 Exterior of Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria, VA



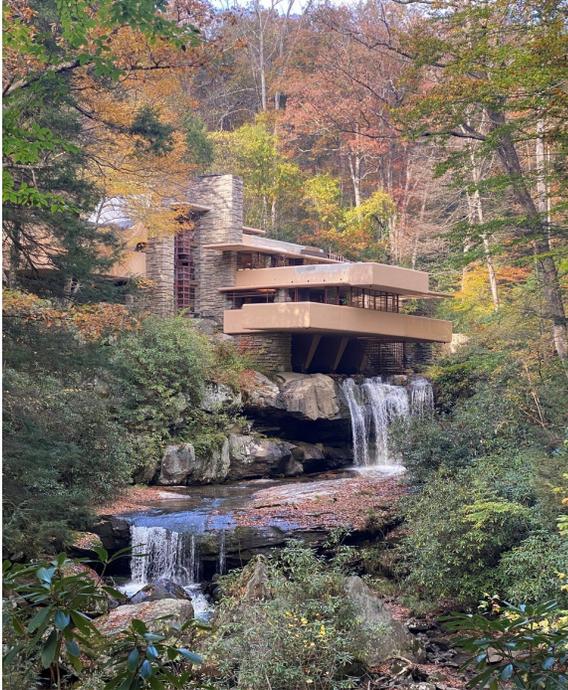
10/25 KentuckKnob exterior—FLW house



10/25 Interior of Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria, VA

Photos cont. on next page

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



10/25 FallingWater exterior

Austin for NYC in August 2015. We became scarce at church in 2014 as I was in the depths of the dissertation. We moved from NYC into the NJ suburbs at the end of 2020-- if you read any articles about people leaving the Upper West Side during Covid, that was us. **Michelle's** choreographing more than dancing these days. She completed a year-long project about a month before the new baby arrived. She teaches ballet as an adjunct professor at Purchase College north of NYC. And, she chases after kids. I work in quantitative finance. I am currently waiting for a non-compete clause to expire so I can start a new job in December. That job will be with a hedge fund in NYC.”



10/26/14 Rhys Ulerich and Michelle Thompson with their sons Ozark and Oxford



10/25 Interior view of FallingWater

Former member **Rhys Ulerich** is delighted to announce, “**Michelle (Thompson)** gave birth to our 3rd son, **Floyd Samson Ulerich**, this past week. **Michelle** and **Floyd** are both doing well. **Floyd** was 5 pounds 9 ounces. Just under 20 inches. A little guy, but well across the board. Both older brothers, **Ozark** (age 14) and **Oxford** (11), have been quite helpful. Timing-wise: We showed up at CCA in about 2006 before being married by Rev **Tom VandeStadt** in 2007. I started a NYC hedge fund job in August 2014 after finishing up my PhD at UT. **Michelle**, **Ozark**, and **Oxford** decamped from



10/25 Newborn Floyd Ulerich with mom Michelle

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes



10/25 Biggest brother Ozark admiring his new baby brother Floyd



10/25 New baby brother making amazing eye contact with his big brother Oxford

Becky Nash is pleased to share, "After four and a half years of dating, **Omar Ghaznavi** and I recently got engaged! When we first met, we each made a list of movies to recommend to each other. For several weeks we emailed back and forth about our opinions of each movie as we watched each other's recommendations. During a recent trip to Bend, Oregon, **Omar** and I visited the last remaining Blockbuster video store. At the back of the store in the staff picks section, **Omar** had secretly made a display of all of the movies we first recommended to each other when we met. As soon as I saw the display I recognized the selection! Moments later he got down on one knee. After I enthusiastically said yes, his mom and sister popped out from behind a shelf and surprised me! After leaving the store we drove to Smith Rock State Park to go for a hike. When we arrived, both of my parents were there to surprise me as well! The six of us ended up spending the whole weekend together. It was absolutely unforgettable." **Becky** is a marvelous massage therapist who is also taking classes at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. **Omar** works in tech sales at a local start up, but in true Austin fashion, his first love is music. He plays in two different bands. One is called The Mask of the Phantasm and the other is called The Crystal Fall (If you have Alexa, give this a try!!). He is a talented song writer and guitarist.



10/25 Newly engaged Omar Ghaznavi and Becky Nash at Smith Rock State Park in Oregon

Personals (cont.)
by Pat Oakes

Charlie Bernacchio and **Catherine Hannon** are planning their holiday visit to Austin and are hoping to be here before Pastor **Ginny's** last Sunday. **Charlie** writes, "So much change is underway for CCA. We think of you often and pray the transitions which will come in the near future go well for the congregation."

Former intern for Rev. **John Towery** a number of years ago, **David Cleaver-Bartholomew**, shares, "We are doing well. Both daughters are well, enjoying their respective jobs, and are happily married. **Audrey** is in Boston and **Lydia** is in Atlanta. **Dena** is in the last 10 days of the first part of her sabbatical leave. She'll take the second part in 2026. We just returned from a tour with the Biblical Archaeological Society to Greece and Turkey where we visited a few places where the apostle **Paul** had churches and/or traveled (Thessalonica, Ephesus, Athens, and Crete). I continue to do tax work, especially for clergy, help out at my home church when I'm asked, and I resume teaching for the New York School of Ministry on Oct. 18th with my Old Testament II class."

Congratulations to **Danny** and **Mary (Towery) Masters**. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a party on October 25, 2025, with family and friends in Taylor, TX. **Mary** said that their son Ricky brought everyone to tears (happy ones, of course) when he shared wonderful words about his parents.



10/25/25 Mary (Towery) and Danny Masters with their son Ricky and his wife Monica--Mary and Danny celebrating 50 wonderful years together



10/25/25 Mary and Danny Masters with their granddaughters Clara and A.J.

History Corner by Mel Oakes

As the church welcomes a new choir director, it seems appropriate to look back at some of our previous directors.

Professor **Waldemar Eric Metzenthin** (1875-1942). Director of Choir-1930-31. Born in Berlin, he came to America with his parents and siblings in 1886. He was Professor of Germanic Language at University of Texas. Other UT positions: 1906-19. Director of Athletics and Physical Training, 1907-15. Coach of Football, Track and Basketball. From 1915 Austin American, "Prof. **Metzenthin** is a noted athlete, having been selected for the All-American football team for his phenomenal work on the Columbia University eleven. He was also on the Columbia basketball team and has coached the Texas varsity eleven." He married **Marguerite Aileen Sykes** in 1915. He was Chair of the UT Athletic Council. He came to The University in 1906 and was actively engaged in its development ever since. Another quote from UT yearbook, "As director of athletics and as a member of the faculty he is a harmonious link between these two branches."

Stanley D. Woodmansee Jr. (1929-1998) served as choir director from about 1958 to 1962. He was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1929 and received his education at the University of Connecticut (B.A., 1951) and the University of Texas at Austin (M.A.). His teaching experience includes positions at the University of Texas, Texas State School for the Blind, Cooke County Junior College, Saint Mary's Academy, Saint Edward's University, Keene State College, as well as public schools in Wilton and Lyndeborough, New Hampshire. Woodmansee wrote and produced several original musicals in addition to directing many musical programs and conducting choral organizations at the college and university levels. A gifted musician, **Woodmansee** participated in numerous organ recitals. His papers are in the University of Connecticut Library.

Marie Scheel (1914-2015) served the church as choir director from about 1963 until 1993. **Marie Ulrika Scheel** passed away on February 21, 2015, at the age of 100. She was born October 4, 1914, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. **Malakias Saviniemi** in Hancock, Michigan. **Marie** left the upper peninsula of Michigan in 1935 to study voice at Sherwood University of Music in Chicago, Illinois. It was there that she met her husband, **Weldon B. Scheel** from Lockhart, Texas. They were married in LaGrange, Illinois, on August 31, 1940, moved to Nixon, Texas and then to Carrizo Springs. They came to Austin in 1946, where **Marie** was an elementary school music teacher for many years. She and **Weldon** were great friends of **Joe** and **Florence Castle**, musicians at the church.

Norma Jane "Nodie" Murphy served as Interim Choir Director from May 1993-1995 when she became full-time choir director. She held that position until 2020. **Nodie Murphy** has long been fascinated by the relationships between and among language, music and movement. She attended Tulane University. She obtained her doctorate in French Language and Literature from Brown University while continuing her studies of flute and ballet. She was for many years a member and choreographer of the Round Rock Community Choir. She served for many years as director of music. Among her many contributions to the church was her creation of worship gifts given by members of the congregation during summer services while choir was on vacation. She was responsible for recruiting many outstanding musicians for the church, **Melanie Wilkinson**, **Amy Harris**, **Aaron Carter-Cohn**, **Jonathan Geer** to name only a few. She and her husband, **Dennis**, held many positions in the church.

Laura Martin was choir director from October 2022 until June 2025 when she accepted a position with The University Christian Church. **Laura** is a central Texas native and received her degree in Choral Music Studies from the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas. In addition to performing as an alto/mezzo-soprano, **Laura** is the head choir director at Pflugerville Middle School in Pflugerville ISD and recently completed Level III in the Kodaly method. She previously served as Choir Director Fort Bend ISD and held positions at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and University Methodist Church.

History Corner by Mel Oakes, cont.



Waldemar Eric Metzenthin



Stanley D. Woodsmansee



Marie Scheel



Nodie Murphy



Laura Martin