

THE VISITOR

September 2022

The Congregational Church of Austin United Church of Christ

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Rev. Amelia Fulbright, Transitional Pastor

Dear Members & Friends,

I am just returning from a period of leave and vacation and trying to catch up on all that transpired while I was away. I ran across this letter that the Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel, Michigan Conference Minister, recently shared with her conference. There might be some insights here that resonate, and I've highlighted a couple paragraphs that seem particularly relevant. I hope you'll feel encouraged that we are doing just fine.

"Is your church experiencing some conflict? If so, you are not alone. As I visit churches across Michigan and talk to leaders across the country and other denominations, I hear it. Churches with long, steady past pastorates are now at odds with a pastor, who suddenly can do nothing right. Churches who already have histories of struggle have seen their normal level of tension increase exponentially. Why?"

First, I don't think there is anything weird or wrong with our churches. After preaching and worshiping over eleven Sundays at thirteen churches across the state, I am inspired by the creativity and courage I see. But the Church, like the rest of society, is still processing the trauma of the last two years of Covid and the growing realization that we can not simply go back in time, institutionally. When we do come back to worship in person and see some empty seats, it's only natural that we miss the people who have not returned. Even happy churches can get grumpy about "why everyone isn't back yet," and start to ask "who is to blame."

But if you wonder if some mythical church down the road is packed, let me tell you, the return is slow across denominations and across the nation. Families with children, stressed to the max during Covid, are the slowest to return to church and both the mega church and the tiny church are feeling it. If you are getting 30% of your previous in person attendance, that is normal. If you are getting 50%, I'd call that a victory. And if your church is a little cranky, give yourself and each other some extra Christian kindness.

Celebrate the people you see in person, rather than using the time to point out who is not there. Give thanks to God for the online participants we never had before Covid, and for the old friends we get to keep in touch with. Please do not shut down your worship videos or stop streaming! It would be the equivalent of locking your door on a Sunday morning. Multiple points of entry, in person or online, are how we show hospitality to the strangers sticking a virtual toe in the water and to the old friends who are out of the habit of showing up.

Consider how important your words and spirit are in worship. If your online worshipers hear announcements begging or shaming them for missing church, you have just negated the hospitality you provided by sharing your worship service online in the first place. Even worse, if what people hear about your church is tedious conflict, and if your church gives a disproportionately large amount of time to a small group of negative people, you have just confirmed your online worshiper's decision to stay away or on the sidelines. This is no time for churches to be feuding, with the people who show up, or with those who don't. Because these days, the whole world really is watching.

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For those of you who are physically together, I hope you can truly celebrate the gift of getting to see someone face to face, which, in our ancient Christian tradition, is truly the image of God. That person you see made a great effort to be there, perhaps for the first time in years. Perhaps that person is you. Embrace each personal connection as the gift it is, and then turn your attention to Jesus, who shows up no matter the numbers, no matter the format, wherever you are on life's journey.

As for me, as your new circuit riding Conference Minister, when I get installed on Sunday, October 23 in person in East Lansing and online, I'm going to be grateful to God for every person there - in person, in spirit or in the mighty cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. We are not alone and we never have been."

I hope to see you Sunday, one way or another!

Peace,
Pastor Amelia

October Visitor Deadline September 29, 2022

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	Jen Howicz
Clerk	Reuel Nash
Historians	Pat & Mel Oakes
Member-at-Large	Bill Beardall
Pastor	Amelia Fulbright
Dir. of Online Ministries	Britt Hicks

Personals by Pat Oakes

Betty and **Whit Bodman** spent a month this summer on a road trip up the east coast. The drive was uneventful, but it was clear, going from town to town, that for much of the country, precautions against Covid are a thing of the past. The highlight of the trip was a family reunion with all of **Whit's** siblings, their children, and grandchildren. In total there were 17-20 adults (depending on the day) and eight children ages eight to two months. The gang rented two houses in Old Orchard Beach, ME, which is a perfect family spot with a beautiful beach and an amusement park with rides even the small ones can manage. **Betty and Whit's** son, **Noah**, his wife **Erin** and the two year old twins, **Arlo** and **Otis** came from Montana. The boys were meeting their extended family for the first time. After a week at the beach, **Betty and Whit** went to their daughter's (newly renovated) apartment in Jersey City to check on their own future residence which is still under construction. **Betty and Whit** are hoping for completion by the end of the year (wishful thinking?) All in all, a great summer trip.



7/27/22 Betty and Whit with brother-in-law hiding from the sun at Orchard Beach, ME



7/28/22 Betty and Whit with daughter Elizabeth's family - Greg holding Elsie, Clara



7/24/22 Betty and Arlo investigating waves on Orchard Beach, ME



7/28/22 Children & grandchildren: L to R: Elsie, Greg, Clara, Elizabeth, Noah, Arlo, Otis, Erin

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes

Retired nurse and wonderful volunteer **Debby Kohrt** had been looking forward to being a part of the most recent Smiles International trip to Cabo san Lucas in Mexico and arrived there on August sixth ready to go to work. On the ninth she got the tragic news that her only son **Jarod**, 43, had died in a terrible automobile accident. He had been called to go in to work an hour earlier than usual, it was dark (4:30 a.m.) and he was driving on a winding road. No one knows what happened, but he hit a tree and he was gone. **Jarod's** only sister **Kristen Parkhill** was finally able to reach **Debby** in Mexico who is so grateful that her long-time Smiles/nurse friend **Tricia** was able to make arrangements for **Debby** to get back home to Austin, the Smiles International folks also helped her immeasurably. **Debby**, **Kristen**, and grandson/son **Caleb** flew to Wisconsin (including a delay in Houston) for three days, flew back home to Austin for three days and flew back to Wisconsin for three more days, including the funeral. Those in the church who have been reading the Personals for a while may remember that **Caleb** and his sister **Zooley** were in **Jarod** and **Laurel's** wedding in 2016. In addition to his beloved wife, he is survived by his 2 children, **Wesley John**, four, and **Brynn Maxine**, two. Please keep **Debby** and **Kristen**, **Jason**, **Caleb**, and **Zooley** and **Laurel** and children in your prayers. **Debby** came to church on September 4th and we were all able to offer hugs and comfort in person as we shared our grief.

Your correspondent felt like she was writing the Covid Chronicles this month. It is quite clear that folks are venturing out more, vaxxed and boosted, but there are certainly problems that can arise with that unwelcome visitor.

Jonathan Geer reports, "Sooooo we've had a lot going on since our last newsletter update :) I finally went on tour again with Atlas Tango Project (formerly Austin Piazzolla Quintet) at the end of July after almost three years of not playing together. It was wonderful to spend time together and make music again. I also ran into former CCA violinist **Andy Strietelmeier** while in Eugene, OR. Unfortunately, while I was on the road, **Roberto** came down with Covid. His symptoms were pretty rough for a week, but then cleared up fairly quickly. Of course, when I returned, I got Covid, too, and had a similar experi-

ence with the symptoms. Fortunately, **Xitlali** never caught it! During this whole time, we've been continuing construction on a house out in Bastrop (I say we, but it's really all **Roberto!**). It is the first house he has designed completely on his own from scratch and built. It has been a long and sometimes stressful journey, but it is exciting to see it coming together and it should be finished in a few more months! We'll move out there when it's complete and then we plan on selling it after a couple years. Don't worry... we'll still be coming into Austin for church on Sundays!!"



6/26/22 Former CCA violinist Andy Strietelmeier with Jonathan Geer in Eugene, OR



6/27/22 A reunion of long-time musical friends l-r--James Anderson, Ben Thomas, (former church cellist) Tony Rogers, Jonathan Geer, Phil Spencer, and Heather and Cecilia Anderson

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



8/6/22 The new Geer/Hernandez home under construction in Bastrop



8/6/22 The new Geer/Hernandez home under construction in Bastrop

Bill Mueller spent almost a week in July at Austin Heart Hospital with pneumonia, then went back to Westminster in Skilled Nursing to regain strength. He was due to be able to go back to their independent living apartment on Labor Day. **Joan** relates that **Whit Bodman** came to visit twice and that they had wonderful visits—all enjoying *sharing* stories!

Warinda Harris has just returned from a whirlwind trip with her dad **Warren Johnson** to the U.S. Open and to Massachusetts and Maine. **Warren** is a fan of getting in a car and driving (swapping off drivers every four hours or so) straight through, so they made it to NYC in about 26 hours and did much the same on the way home. **Warren** and **Warinda** are huge tennis fans, so they were delighted to see **Serena Williams** play on opening night—and other players, too--**Coco Gauff** and **Rafa Nadal** among others. After two and a half marvelous days of tennis, they were off to points north seeing **Warinda's** in-laws and visiting **John's** family place on an island in Maine. **Warren** and **Warinda** headed home with 25 live lobsters in the car (carefully packed with dry ice and seaweed). They dropped some off at the in-laws and some in Houston, and **Warinda** made it back with enough for a fabulous lobster fest at home with her mom **Barbara**, husband **John**, and sons **Alden**, and **Will**.



8/6/22 Jonathan and Xitlali at the front door of the new Hernandez/Geer home under construction in Bastrop

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Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes



8/29/22 Avid tennis fans Warren Johnson and his daughter Warinda Harris at the US Open

Seth Murphy got cheated out of a 50th birthday celebration because of Covid, but he is hoping to have a small gathering for his 52nd. His sister **Sarah Sennour** and **Aunt Marita** (**Dennis**' sister) are coming up early for **Seth**'s birthday celebration this year. He's hoping to make up for no big celebration in 2020 at some point, but travel is still not very inviting. Technically he'll be 52 on the 13th of this month. Happy birthday, **Seth**!!!

Barbara Burnham shares, "Son **Robin** is still feeling fatigued after his terrible bout with Covid. He did play with his band recently. The band is called Rhinosaur. He plays bass guitar and sings some. They usually play on Friday nights at Speak-easy and Anderson Mill Pub, but **Julia** says they aren't playing any kind of regular schedule. **Sam** is in 5th grade and **Rebecca** is in 1st grade at Cunningham Elementary, but of course they have hardly been in school this year! **Julia** works for TEA in special education oversight. **Robin** still works for a web hosting company in security. They tried very hard to isolate during the Covid episode, but it was next to impossible! Everyone else in the family is feeling fine and **Julia** and **Sam** are now testing negative. They aren't going to retest **Rebecca** until Labor Day Monday. I'm sure she'll be negative in time for **Sam**'s 11th birthday party the next weekend! My new work location within the huge IRS building on S. Interstate 35 is much easier on my body. I am walking a total of about half a mile, instead of a mile. Unfortunately, walking that mile

every day when I first started worsened the arthritis in my hip, so sitting can be quite painful after a while. Our desks raise up so we can work standing up, which provides some relief. I continue to enjoy the work and am trying to increase my speed."

Beth Gleason says, "Two old friends catching up! I drove over from Maine and **Liz** came down from VT. This is at the Covered Bridge restaurant in NH (a real Yankee covered bridge is in the background), plus Flower the dog!" As far as medical news, which people may be curious about, just say I am happy to be in remission and enjoying the onset of fall, New England's best season, plus I keep busy providing Sunday pulpit supply in Southern Maine's many UCC churches." Sadly, **Jaime Hadley** has had Covid so he had to cancel his trip over Labor Day weekend to Boston and Maine. He had really been looking forward to the visit with **Beth**, but discretion is definitely the better part of valor—especially in these Covid times.



8/25/22 Liz Nash and Beth Gleason (accompanied by the ever-faithful Flower) were delighted to get together for lunch in New Hampshire recently

Whit Bodman relates, "I have been a sustaining member of KUT for a long time and a pledger from the beginning. I have been hearing the little stories about connection to KUT, which led me to think about my own history with KUT. Undoubtedly their intention. The one that most comes to mind is when I was in Cairo, and I would listen to KUT on my laptop. Pledge week came up and so I pledged. Then I dropped an email to someone at KUT that I had just pledged from Cairo. I heard back that they, too

Personals (cont) by Pat Oakes

thought that was cool and had announced that on the radio and offered me a tour of the studio. What I did not know was that one of my colleagues at the seminary had assigned her preaching class to listen to KUT that morning, and they heard that announcement, accompanied by some faux-Egyptian music (undoubtedly politically incorrect). Didn't learn about that until I got back. So, I thought that would be a good story to tell, and emailed KUT about that. They invited me in for a recording session. I talked about that, and about arriving here in 2002 and listening to KUT while in the garage building bookshelves. Pledge time came up and I pledged. **Dennis Murphy** commented on Sunday that he had heard me pledge on the radio, with great approval. **Dennis'** name did not survive the cutting floor. I talked about other things - the discovery that cowboy boots made it easier to stroll, since my New England instinct is to hustle along with no dillydallying or lallygagging. **Betty** used to grab the back of my shirt to get me to slow down. But there is no fast in boots, which also makes them good for walking with grandchildren. So it was a half-hour session, from which they distilled what you heard. They also produced one on the boots, but that may never make it to the sound waves."

Amy Harris has finished the work on her house remodel. She threw a small party to celebrate taking out a few walls, updating the kitchen, living room, and flooring. Her house is looking much more 2022, and a lot less 1982!



8/20/22 Party time at Amy Harris's newly remodeled home

Mel and **Pat Oakes** had a great trip to San Francisco, although it was complicated by Covid. They had intended to stay two weeks while housesitting for their friends whose home is just a block or 2 from Golden Gate Park. Daughter **Mardie** had been working on the east coast all summer and got home on a Monday and picked up her folks on Tuesday. On Thursday they had a wonderful visit with **Pat's** niece **Pragya Mishra** and her family. Grandson **Durham** arrived home from his time in North Carolina with his dad's family on Friday. On Saturday, **Pat** started feeling unwell and tested positive for Covid on Sunday. **Mel** got sick on Monday and **Durham** on Tuesday. Both **Mel** and **Pat** followed **Biden's** plan and used Paxlovid. **Mardie** had had Covid in March and had been recently boosted and fortunately remained well the whole time. A day or two later, their friends who were traveling in Europe came down with Covid, too. They ended up extending their stay by a week in Europe, so **Mel** and **Pat** were able to extend their stay by a week, too. Covid meant missing some special times (a visit from **Pat's** brother in LA and seeing one of her former students), but they still got to walk in the cool to the park, enjoy time with **Mardie** and **Durham**, meet up with some old friends, and go to several museums.



8/7/22 At the wonderful new Presidio Tunnel Tops Park in San Francisco—Durham (11), Pat, Mardie, and Mel

Photo cont. on the next page

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



8/5/22 Pat and Mel visiting the Obamas in Golden Gate Park at the deYoung Art Museum, just 3 blocks from where they were staying--an easy walk



6/30/22 Florence Castle's Mason and Hamblin grand piano which Paul Castle made available to Amy and her new studio located on Cuernavaca Street in the Westlake area Hannah Mindeman Shuman is the piano teacher.

Our church office administrator **Donna Cravens** is grieving the loss of her 80-year-old sister **Wanda Schlenker**. She was recently widowed and had not been in good health for a long time. Wanda in Phoenix was talking to her other sister **JoAnn** in Las Vegas when the conversation suddenly stopped. The caregiver in the room realized she quietly had died. **Donna** flew out to Phoenix for a few days which put her behind getting back to work at the office. **Donna** is very glad to be back—and her dog Christi is also glad she is back here, too.

Our much-loved friend and member **Ruth Koenig**, 94, died peacefully the morning of September 10 after a brief illness. While in hospice care in her apartment at Belmont Village, her son **John** was constantly by her side. We thank **John** for keeping church members apprised of how she was doing so that some folks were able to go by for a brief visit. She will be remembered for her gracious manner, her indomitable spirit, her great intellect and insatiable curiosity. She kept on learning until the very end. Services are pending.



5/13/15 Paul Castle with his mother Florence on her 99th birthday at her 1930 Mason and Hamblin grand piano which her parents gave her in 1933 when she was 16



12/13 Ruth Koenig's book Cover—A GIRL NAMED RUTH — She wrote the book for her grandchildren and nieces and nephews

Personals (cont)
by Pat Oakes



Ruth Fissel was born in 1927 and grew up on a farm in northwest Ohio, near the town of Spencerville. Between then and now, she married Don Koenig, bore two sons, Doug and John, graduated from college with bachelor's and master's degrees, and was for many years a high school and community college teacher. Most of her life has been spent in Ohio and Illinois, although she also lived for a year each in Great Britain and China, and now makes her home in Austin, Texas.

This is Ruth's second book. Her first, *The Red Blackboard*, published in 1996, recounts the year she and her husband spent in China, teaching English at the Chengdu College of Technology.

A brief biography of Ruth on the back of her book, *A GIRL NAMED RUTH*



12/2/12 Joe McMillan introducing new members--Amy Villwock, Shannon Quisenberry, Fountain Walker, Warinda Harris, Bill Campbell, Victoria Li, Josh Sabik, Jason and Kristen Parkhill, Janet Burns, Ruth Koenig, Cecile Adam, Tom V., and Beth Gleason—a stellar group indeed

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes

Church work parties have been a tradition at the church for many years. I don't have pictures or the time to go through all of the annual reports, but sometime in the late '40s or early '50s folks including the Scheels, Matt Blackstock, the Towerys and others actually dug out and created more space—years prior to adding the education wing in the late '60s. This is a quote from one of the church histories , "A basement was excavated under the Fellowship Room (then the Student Lounge) with volunteer workers removing dirt by hand with buckets and wheelbarrows. A room measuring 27' by 27' provided additional space for church school and fellowship dinners."

If you are interested in more church history, look at <https://www.patandmeloakes.com/PatandMelOakesFamilySite/CCAHistory/SiteGuide.html>



1968 Sara Ross and the church basement renovation (now the Appel room) —it was a team effort—we made the curtains and painted the holders



2/14/1976 Sara Ross and Bob Winter helping to redo John's office as a part of our bicentennial celebration

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



3/14/76 Pastor John Towery looking at his new office—1976--Our bicentennial project for the church--Stella Morrison, Bonnie Tarvin, Betty Tarvin, Betsy Russell, Hildegard Everett. Pastor John Towery, Carrie Coleman, Garry Cole, Alfred Wupperman (currently the church library)



7/31/06 Suzanne Vanderpoel on moving day for remodel of the kitchen and nursery wing

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



7/31/06 Betty Bodman supervising Nancy Edison who was moving a mobile during the nursery renovation



7/31/06 Triumphant Cathy Hubbs after the storage closet was cleared out before the nursery wing remodel

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



3/6/09 Sharon Brown cleaning out the paraments closet at church



3/6/09 Dave Ross shines the pews and Mel Oakes works on the door

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



3/6/09 Betty Bodman polishes up a storm in the fellowship room



8/24/09 Mathis Blackstock moving bricks at church



1/23/10 Jen Howicz, Marilyn Vaché, and Barbara Burnham at the church-wide book sale

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



2/26/12 A restoration project was underway to make repairs to the tapestry that has hung over the altar for more than 30 years—led by Christi Kuehner with Sara and Dave Ross, Fran Briggs, and Nodie Murphy



4/26/14 The church garage sale held at the Rosses' home to raise funds for our mission work in El Salvador—Liz Nash

There is a large gap here. I am sure there were work parties that I did not get to or that folks did not think about taking pictures, but it is fun to look back to see the kinds of work the congregation was involved with to keep our church family afloat.

History Corner by Pat & Mel Oakes, cont.



2/19/22 Elementary classroom - items to be removed during the mold remediation process



2/19/22 Stephen Russell and Jen Howicz, part of the work party, hard at work cleaning up the nursery getting ready for the mold remediation process,