Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

As the end of 2013 draws near, we at Austin Grad are counting our blessings. This reflection is not because we are "tempest tossed" or "discouraged, thinking all is lost." We are counting our blessings because we see what God has done and is doing through this school and we are thankful.

We are thankful for each new semester and the students who come seeking to be better preachers, teachers, and disciples as they study under the guidance of our professors. We are grateful for our alumni, who are using what they learned at Austin Grad to serve the church, tell the gospel story, and advance God's kingdom.

We are thankful for you, our friends, who are faithful in prayer and generous with your resources. You join with us in our mission to promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the Kingdom of God.

We are thankful for the stories our students, past and present, tell about their ministries, their lives, and their spiritual journeys. These accounts allow us to see beyond the classroom.

This issue of Update includes five of these stories, two from alumni, two from current students, and one from a former student turned professor. We hope you are encouraged when you see what God has done and is doing through Austin Graduate School of Theology.

Once again, thank you for partnering with us as we seek to prepare men and women for service in God's kingdom. You are one of our greatest blessings. May God's richest blessings be yours this day and every day.
Student Presentations Are Highpoint of Friends’ Day

The Friends’ Day gathering on October 19th began with a time of worship, followed by a report from Fred Strietelmeier, chairman of the board of trustees, and a keynote address by Daniel Napier. As usual, the highpoint of the morning was the presentations by Austin Grad students Spencer Prather, Jim Hays, and Edward Fleming. Abridged versions of two presentations are included here.

Spencer Prather

Spencer Prather grew up in San Antonio. She attended the University of Texas Austin where she completed a BA in English and a BA in Sociology. Spencer is president of the Austin Grad Student Association for 2013-2014.

After earning my bachelor’s degrees, I came to the conclusion that my life-long dream of attending law school was not something that I truly desired. I had always wanted to serve others, but I was intimidated by my own ignorance concerning Scripture and Christian ministry.

On my first day at Austin Grad I felt like I was drowning in a sea of knowledge, so I sought out someone with whom I could share my feelings of inadequacy. His advice pushed me forward in my studies. Incidentally, he is now teaching at Austin Grad.

I love that I know the Austin Grad faculty. I’ve been to dinner in their homes and become friends with their children. I was baptized by a member of the faculty and he officiated at my wedding. More importantly, I love that my professors know me. They know my personal struggles and how to most effectively help me as a person, a student, and a Christian. They were there for me as I cared for a best friend dying of cancer, allowing me time to grieve silently in the middle of classes. They were there as I struggled with a difficult time in my pregnancy, allowing me to take my finals late as I teetered on the brink of hospitalization. This is my Austin Grad experience.

People ask me why I came to seminary if, as a woman in the Church of Christ, I will not be allowed to preach. My answer is this: I did not come to Austin Grad to become a preacher, but to become a servant of Christ. The examples provided to me at Austin Grad have more than adequately prepared me for service in God’s kingdom.

Jim Hays

I enrolled at Abilene Christian University in the fall of 1977, majoring in Mass Communications. I landed a job my freshman year, so education suddenly seemed unnecessary. I was of the misguided opinion that the only reason to get a degree was to get a job.

In 1981, I dropped out of ACU, moved to California, and continued a 33-year career that would take me to nine cities. In 1998, I took a job in Los Angeles with a large radio network. It was my dream job and I hoped it would last until I retired.

I worshipped with the North Oaks Church of Christ in Santa Clarita. When they heard that I had actually driven through the parking lot at Abilene Christian, they immediately assumed I could preach. Tom Smith, the minister, asked me to preach for him when he needed to be out of town. I said, “No way.” Leading even a short prayer caused shortness of breath and Nixon-esque perspiration. There was no way I would ever preach a sermon.
But Tom kept asking and finally, I said, "Yes." It went pretty well. I didn't have a heart attack and nobody went to sleep and fell out of a window.

In the spring of 2006, Tom announced he was moving to be near his new granddaughter and the elders asked me to be the preacher. I could keep my radio job. They would handle the pastoral duties; they just wanted me to fill the 20 minutes on Sunday morning. So I did.

A year later, because of aging parents, my wife and I felt a need to get back to Texas. In May of 2007, the church in Goldthwaite hired me to be their full-time minister.

Larry Roberts, the preacher in Eastland, invited me to Sermon Seminar and introduced me to Austin Grad. At the end of 2010, the Southern Hills church in Buda hired me and the elders asked me to get a Bible degree. It seems churches are pretty adamant about having a preacher who knows something about the Bible. So, I enrolled at Austin Grad. If the Lord wills it, I will graduate this May, finally getting my bachelor's degree after 37 years.

In my 8-year preaching career, I have been blessed to have mentors who helped me find a little footing. But the genuine mentoring began when I came to this campus. Someone asked me how I liked Austin Grad and I said, "Trust me, it's not freshman Bible at ACU." This is seminary; the people here are serious about the word.

Also, Austin Grad is not a diploma factory. It is a person-centered, needs-driven, relationally-structured institution not only in the business of teaching data, but also teaching values and lifestyles. I needed to hear Dr. Shipp say, "Preachers are called to live to a higher standard."

The professors at this school love and revere the word in print. They love and revere the word in flesh. They love to teach, and I truly believe they love every student. I absolutely believe they understand the gravity of their responsibility to educate young men and women to be ministers of God's word. And sometimes even old men and women.

All three unabridged student presentations, as well as Dr. Napier's address, can be seen at www.youtube.com/austingradseminary.
Joining God in Mission

Austin Grad has received me from the Eastern European mission field once more. My life in mission sometimes feels like the oblong flight of a boomerang. In 1995 I returned to the United States after a few years serving in Thessaloniki, Greece. My only intention was to complete enough theological education to be more adequate on the mission field. Through an odd twist, I learned of Austin Grad (then ICS) and when the dust settled I was studying in Austin. Much ministry and several schools later, in 2006, my family and I were again called to foreign mission service. Last year, after six years of service in Zagreb, Croatia, we repatriated. Again Austin Grad catches the boomerang. I'm beginning to suspect that one should prepare to serve in Austin before agreeing to Eastern European service. That's how the boomerang flies.

Through the odd rhythms of outward soaring and homeward return, God has taught me a lesson or two. These stand out as thoughts I've mulled over upon both returns.

First, our times are in God's hands. The goals and expectations with which we enter mission must always be held tentatively. God alone knows for what bit of work in the rhythm of planting, watering, and reaping we will be used. The strategy or orchestration of mission belongs to God, not us. The intention of mission, however, must always be ours. Our job is to intentionally join with God in whatever work we find him doing. Thus God shall strategically guide and cause the increase; we need only to faithfully and intently join him in his mission.

Second, the God who crosses boundaries to receive and descends in order to elevate and ennable others – the God of Jesus Christ – is not headquartered in the United States. Mission is not simply sending from here to elsewhere. Austin, too, is a mission field. Over a hundred nations have gathered at our threshold in this city. Faces, tongues, and customs unknown greet us in our own supermarkets and in our own neighborhoods. While unsettling to our search for natural comforts (when have mission opportunities not been?), I see this gathering as a providential act of grace. Consider where, and with whom, God has placed us. What better place for a new generation both to engage in mission and to prepare for further mission abroad? Austin is the perfect gymnasium for mission training. May God grant Austin Grad and his churches the wisdom and resources needed to join him in mission.

"God alone knows for what bit of work in the rhythm of planting, watering, and reaping we will be used."

Daniel A. Napier
Assistant Professor
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Alumnae Profile
Brooke Hollingsworth

Through the centuries numerous scholars have studied both mathematics and theology. Brooke Hollingsworth continues that tradition. Born in Kentucky and raised in Tennessee and the Pacific Northwest, Brooke earned a BS in mathematics from Harding University and a PhD from the University of Texas. Her love of learning and desire to be better equipped for ministry led her to enroll in the Austin Grad MATS program in 2005. She received her degree in 2008.

Today, Brooke teaches math and Bible at Brentwood Christian School in Austin where she seeks to fulfill the school's mission: "to lead students to love God and to nurture them in a Christ-centered academic environment that emphasizes excellence and inspires them to develop their God-given talents for lives of Christian leadership and service."

When asked about the challenges of teaching, Brooke replied, "Teaching Bible every day to teenagers in an academic setting is hard! I want to be faithful to the text, and I want to inspire them to love God. I have had to learn a lot of Bible." She views her time at Austin Grad as invaluable in helping her meet this challenge.

Through the preaching and teaching courses at Austin Grad, Brooke learned how to present the biblical text in engaging ways that make it relevant to her students. The textual courses not only added to her Bible knowledge but they introduced her to various resources and prepared her to use those resources responsibly. While developing a theology class for high school seniors she relied heavily on her work at Austin Grad.

In addition to her teaching duties, for the past nine years Brooke has devoted countless hours to Come before Winter. Founded by Karen Alexander (MS '95), Come before Winter seeks to encourage and equip women in ministry around the world. Brooke serves in the equipping portion of the ministry teaching advanced Bible study skills. She was a primary developer of the current Exodus curriculum. In preparing the curriculum, she relied heavily on the exegetical skills she learned at Austin Grad.

For Brooke, the benefits of studying at Austin Grad go beyond academics. She describes the impact on her own spiritual journey like this:

"I learned that Christians have believed and do believe a variety of things, for which there are both scriptural and historical reasons. Being able to ask questions about my faith and engage in them with other people at AGST and in books has made faith sustainable to me. I needed to know other people who struggle with the intellectual aspects of faith."

Brooke and her husband, Brent, have two children—Lanae, a freshman at Seattle Pacific University, and John, a sophomore at Brentwood Christian School. For recreation, Brooke watches her children play basketball, baseball, and golf and she reads books on theology.

Recommended Reading

Thomas R Schreiner, The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (Baker Academic Press, 2013). An informative survey of the biblical canon, tracing the unifying themes of the vision of God as King and Lord, humankind as created in God's image, and the land or place in which God's kingship is exercised.

David Bentley Hart, The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss (Yale University Press, 2013). A philosophically rich yet readable consideration of what Christian faith in God shares with other religious traditions, and how this faith makes sense of our experience of life in a way that atheism can't.

Recommendations by Jeff Peterson

Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies, by David Bentley Hart, is a highly engaging jaunt through church history that, along the way, dispels various forms of the widespread myth that Christianity has been a negative force in civilization.

Recommended by Keith Stanglin

Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament, by Peter Enns. This is a readable and relevant discussion of the Old Testament in light of the Christian doctrine of scripture.

Recommended by Mark Shipp
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Smithwick Church of Christ, Marble Falls
Sunset Ridge Church of Christ, San Antonio
University Avenue Church of Christ, Austin
Western Hills Church of Christ, Austin

This list represents gifts received from July 1, 2013 to October 31, 2013.
"That was amazing!" Those were the first words I heard from a couple after they heard student presentations at our most recent Friends’ Day. Although they have been acquainted with Austin Grad for years, this was their first visit to our school. In the conversation they also said, “We had no idea that the school did all of this.”

Spencer Prather, Jim Hays, and Edward Fleming gave firsthand accounts of their experience at Austin Grad. From very different backgrounds and perspectives they share one thing in common. The instruction, assistance and nurture they receive from Austin Grad professors, and the assistance they get from the staff makes a difference.

The student stories affirmed what so many of us know. Our mission to promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the Kingdom of God is fulfilled in our classrooms, halls, student commons, and offices on a daily basis.

In addition to the student stories, Professor Daniel Napier presented his vision for a ministry and mission internship program. His work as a theologian is enhanced by his years of experience in the pulpit and in missions in Eastern Europe. Daniel is passionate about the process necessary for all of us to come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

The idea of spiritual formation is possibly the most popular trend in Christian discipleship today. It has become so popular that it causes some to wonder if it has degenerated into the status of a fad. As such it sometimes appears to lack specific shape, form, and direction.

Daniel’s concept of a student internship program would bring shape, form, and direction that are specifically Christian. It would be rooted in the best of spiritual formation practices drawn from the historic Christian faith.

It is amazing what is being done and can be done at Austin Grad. Our board of trustees continues to provide wise guidance, daily prayers, and substantial support to this good work. Our friends and partners have joined with them. For that we are thankful.

Our students, faculty, and staff join in the daily work of making disciples of Jesus. Sometimes getting caught up in the everyday routine I forget how significant this is. It was refreshing to hear first-time guests witness it and say, “That’s amazing!”

Our work involves many people using their gifts and callings in different ways to provide a place where the goal of maturity in Christ can be pursued rigorously. I recall Paul’s words to the Philippian church, “I thank God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

In the end, I pray that this good work is ultimately known to have been done in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to the glory of God.

—Stan Reid, President
Convocation Starts Fall Semester

On August 26th Austin Grad’s faculty, staff, and students convened to celebrate the start of a new school year. Members of the faculty and staff led the worship service. In the word of exhortation based on Luke 2:41-52, President Reid encouraged the audience to dedicate the 2013-2014 academic year to the Father’s work, to being in his house, and to continually looking for Jesus’ presence in every aspect of life.

Fred Strietelmeier, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, delivered the words of prayer and consecration. He called everyone present to be faithful and obedient disciples of Christ, upholding and encouraging one another in personal growth, ministry, and service to the church.

A time of food and fellowship followed the convocation service.

Faculty News

During the summer break, Mark Shipp directed an archaeological dig in Israel at Tel Tamar. This is the eighth year for this dig. Current excavation is centered in the pre-Solomonic stratum, probably dated between 1100 and 1000 BC. Dr. Shipp and the archaeological team have been awarded the publication rights to the dig. While in Israel, Dr. Shipp also helped coordinate a team filming the documentary Searching for Solomon.

Daniel Napier’s new book, En Route to the Confessions: The Roots and Development of Augustine’s Philosophical Anthropology is now available on Amazon. This summer, after a trip to St. Petersburg, Russia, Dr. Napier taught a series on “The Way: An Invitation to Jesus’ Form of Life” in the Chrétiens on Mission program in Marseilles, France. From France the Napier family went on to Zagreb, Croatia where they spent a few weeks refreshing mentoring relationships and Dr. Napier taught in the churches.

Jeff Peterson attended the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting in St. Andrews, Scotland, on July 7-11 and presented a paper on “The ‘Paulinism’ of First John.”

Keith Stanglin’s article “Baptized in the Sea: An Invitation to Typological Interpretation” was published in a recent issue of Leaven: A Journal of Christian Ministry. Additionally, he will be a speaker and panel participant in the Evangelical Studies Group and Open and Relational Theologies Group at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Baltimore on November 23-26, 2013.
From Austin to Dublin: an Interview with Shay Smith

AG: What motivated you to seek a theological degree?

SS: I completed a two year apprentice missionary program during the middle of my undergraduate studies and this experience led me to consider ministry as a vocation. By the time I finished my undergraduate degree, I gave into what I considered to be a strong call to ministry.

AG: How did you hear about Austin Graduate School of Theology?

SS: While I was at the University of Texas I was exposed to AGST through the University Avenue Church of Christ campus ministry. A couple of years later, one of my aunts actually encouraged me to take a look at AGST as a possible place for theological training. So in 2002, after finishing my undergraduate degree, I took the plunge!

AG: How have you used what you learned at Austin Grad?

SS: I served for seven years as the youth minister at Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin. Presently, my wife, Juli, and I are working with a mission/church planting team in Dublin, Ireland. We have been involved in this work for more than three years and we have seen eight new believers come to faith in Christ. We are working in a house church context and we hope to see several other house churches emerge from our present one. Our team is involved with community service such as teaching English to immigrants, working with asylum seekers and drug addicts, coaching youth sports teams, volunteering in charity shops, ministering to prostitutes and others affected by sex trafficking, and trying to reach our friends and neighbors with the gospel. We also have the opportunity to study the Bible with several seekers each week in various settings throughout the city. Our present house church meets weekly and we average between 15 and 25 for worship.

AG: That is an extraordinary list of ministries. Has the work in Ireland been more or less challenging than you expected?

SS: Secular, Western Europe is not known as a hot-bed for Christianity. It has been a challenge to plant gospel seeds in difficult soil, but there has been much to rejoice over as we have seen Christ’s Spirit beginning to change lives. I cannot imagine trying to work in the difficult field of Ireland without having been equipped with the tools that the faculty and staff at AGST provided. I appreciate the fact that faculty members were mentors, friends, and fellow sojourners as well as top notch biblical and theological instructors.

AG: What impact did your studies have on your personal spiritual journey?

SS: I love the fact that AGST is in conversation with all Christian traditions who acknowledge Jesus as the resurrected Lord. By studying with people from various and diverse faith backgrounds I was challenged to better understand my own beliefs and traditions, and at times, to modify them. Through the challenge of higher theological education I have become more comfortable in not always knowing the answer and instead learning to simply trust in Jesus and the Spirit.

In addition to his studies at Austin Grad, Shay attended the University of Texas and Abilene Christian University. Shay holds a BA in Humanities with an emphasis in History from Lubbock Christian University.
Visionary Philanthropy

Things to Remember About Your Year-End Giving

As year end approaches, there are a number of things to be considered as you contemplate your charitable giving.

First, your gifts to Austin Grad are greatly appreciated and so important. They provide the difference between what is expected and what exceeds expectations. Your charitable gifts literally keep the school running. They also enable many students to attend on scholarship that otherwise would not be able to continue their education.

The mission of Austin Grad is routinely reviewed and evaluated by the Board of Trustees. It remains a worthy description of why we exist. That mission statement is: To promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the Kingdom of God.

Your gifts to Austin Grad make you partners in this mission and servants in God's kingdom in a very special way.

Here are some other things to consider.

- For our friends who are at least 70 1/2, your gift may be made directly from your IRA account until December 31st. Your gift will apply to your required IRA distribution and will lower the amount of your taxable income. In effect, it becomes a tax-free gift.

- A life income gift in the form of a Charitable Gift Annuity supports Austin Grad while providing annual income to the donor for life along with favorable tax benefits. For example, a $10,000 gift from a person 70 years old will provide income of $510 a year (5.1%) and a charitable deduction of $4,100. Of the $510 per year, $371 is tax-free.

- A gift of your home, second home, farm or ranch may be given to Austin Grad while reserving life estate. You will retain the use of the property for the rest of your life but will enjoy a substantial charitable income tax deduction in the year it is given.

- A gift to Austin Grad in your will continues your support of our mission long after you are gone. We will be happy to provide exact wording for your will upon your request.

In making your current gifts to Austin Grad you may want to honor someone or memorialize a deceased friend or loved one through our "Pay for a Day" program. You can become a "Keeper of the Flame" or a "Lightbearer" through your annual or monthly gift.

Remember that all gifts to be deducted in 2013 must be made by December 31, 2013.

Also remember that larger gifts may be pledged and paid over a convenient period of time. Pledges are not tax deductible but payments on pledges are deductible in the year the payment is made.

Once again, we want to thank all who routinely support Austin Grad with your charitable gifts. We also invite those who have yet to give to do so now. You can be assured that your gift will go far in equipping men and women to serve the Lord through the quality theological education provided by the outstanding faculty of Austin Grad.

If you have questions about Austin Grad, please call. Our number is 512-476-2772 or my e-mail address is nhaney@austingrad.edu.

Our prayer is that the Lord's blessings will be upon you at this special time of the year when your thoughts turn toward others and you count the personal blessings in your life.

—Neil Haney
Director of Development
Expand your horizons...

Classes for the Spring semester begin January 13th. Why not audit a class? Add to your Bible knowledge, learn more about church history or theology, or broaden your understanding of Christian ministry.

Tuition is a bargain but the experience is priceless.

Go to http://www.austingrad.edu for a full list of classes. To register call 512/476-2772
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