



Friends Church
An Open & Affirming Congregation



A Closer Walk

Rev. T. Denise Anderson, inspired by Luke 3:1-18

December 15, 2024

11:00am

WELCOME TO FRIENDS CHURCH!

We are honored that you have chosen to spend your Sunday morning with us. Friends Congregational Church is an **Open & Affirming** congregation of the United Church of Christ. We welcome all people into the full life and ministry of our church—people of all ages, races, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities. No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

FIRST TIME AT FRIENDS? If you are a guest with us today, please let us know. Welcome cards are located in the chair backs to fill out and leave in the offering plate during today's offertory. If you are joining us online for today's service, you will find an Online Visitor Card at <https://www.friends-ucc.org/your-first-visit>. We are so glad you are here, so please let us know if there is anything we can do for you.

CHILDCARE: We invite children to participate fully in our community and worship life. Children of all ages are welcome in worship or you may choose childcare, offered for ages 1-5 in the nursery down the hall through the piano side double doors. We currently have Covid Protocols in place, which you can find posted outside the nursery door.

WiFi: To access church WiFi, please use this login information:
WiFi – The Promised LAN Password: stillspeaking

RESTROOMS are located through the double doors on the piano side of the sanctuary. Gender assigned restrooms are straight down at the end of the hall, and a gender neutral restroom is to the immediate right.

LEADING IN TODAY'S SERVICE:

Lay Leaders: Becky Burks & Holly Scott
Communion Steward: Kathy Yeager
Greeters: Kathy Yeager, Doris Machinski, & Stacy De Leon

Next Sunday, Dec 22:
Lay Leaders: Dinah Anderson & Tyler Baker-Wilkinson
Greeters: Jan and Kristen Hibbetts & Eli Vasquez

We give God thanks for our volunteers sharing their gifts. To volunteer for a Sunday as a lay leader, communion steward, or greeter, email worship@friends-ucc.org.

COMMUNION ON REQUEST: While the sacrament of communion is observed in worship on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month at Friends, communion is available any Sunday on request. If you would like to receive communion on a 2nd, 4th, or 5th Sunday, please find one of our pastors to serve you at the conclusion of the worship service.

Third Sunday of Advent

Advent means 'Coming' in Latin. The four Sundays in Advent are observed in preparation for the coming nativity of Jesus, the Christ child. The Advent season is a time of expectant waiting for the celebration of Emanuel, 'God with us,' being born into the world at Christmas. It is also the beginning of the liturgical year in Western Christianity.

SCRIPTURE FOR MEDITATION: Philippians 4:4-7, NRSV

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

CHIMING OF THE TRINITY

WORDS OF WELCOME

Trent Williams

PRELUDE & LIGHTING OF THE ALTAR CANDLES

***CALL TO WORSHIP (RESPONSIVE)**

Holly Scott

One: A voice calls out in the wilderness.

**All: It sings of a home for all.
It speaks of justice and peace.**

One: We could choose to ignore it.

**All: We could drown out that song.
We could choose not to listen.**

One: Instead, we come into this space.

All: We let the world grow quiet. We listen.

One: A voice calls out in the wilderness. Do you hear it?

**All: We hear it. In listening, we worship.
Let us draw near to God.**

***OPENING HYMN FOR LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE -**
While We Are Waiting, Come

Waiting

1 While we are wait - ing, come;
2 With power and glo - ry, come;
3 Come, Sav - ior, quick - ly come;

while we are wait - ing, come.
with power and glo - ry, come.
come, Sav - ior, quick - ly come.

Je - sus, our Lord, Em - man - u - el,

while we are wait - ing, come.

***INVOCATION**

Holly Scott

CALL TO CONFESSION

Trent Williams

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (UNISON)

Trent Williams

Expansive God, we know that the church is your house, and your house has room for everyone.

Yet, too often, instead of setting the table for our neighbors, we block the door.

Instead of welcoming all, we judge others by our own standards.

Instead of sharing our second coat, we hide it in the attic, holding on to fear instead of letting go with love.

Remind us that your home is a home for all, that truth requires hard work, that truth requires uncomfortable justice.

Help us to be bold enough to see it and brave enough to live it.

With hope we pray, amen.

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS (RESPONSIVE)

Trent Williams

One: Family of faith, God sent prophets like John the Baptist to us because this work is not easy. Helping create a world where all might have a home, and all might be loved, and all might know peace, is an audacious goal. Fortunately for us, when we mess up—when we lose our way or forget our call—we are met with grace. God could not love us any more or any less than God already does. So rest in this good news:

All: **We are at home with God—forgiven, claimed, and loved.
The door is always open for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

Trent Williams

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.

Many: **And also with you!**

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING

Zephaniah 3:14-20, NRSV

Holly Scott

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will

make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

GOSPEL READING

Luke 3:1-18, CEB

Brooke Dooley

In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius—when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was ruler over Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. This is just as it was written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

A voice crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be leveled. The crooked will be made straight and the rough places made smooth. All humanity will see God’s salvation.”

Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, “You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don’t even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham’s children from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.”

The crowds asked him, “What then should we do?”

He answered, “Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. They said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He replied, “Collect no more than you are authorized to collect.”

Soldiers asked, “What about us? What should we do?”

He answered, “Don’t cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay.”

The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. John replied to them all, “I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I’m not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can’t be put out.” With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

One: The Word of God for the people of God.
All: God is still speaking. Thanks be to God!

MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

INVITATION TO SHARE

Holly Scott

OFFERTORY

Secure online giving via Realm Giving at bit.ly/givetofriendsucc
Venmo to 979-307-8860 or @friendsucc

*DOXOLOGY

Praise to God, the One who made us. Praise to Christ, God's on - ly - Son.
the new* - born

Praise the Spir - it, ev - er - with us. Praise the God - head, Three in - One.

Clear a path! Pre-prepare the way! Ad - vent leads to Christ - mas Day!

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Dan De Leon

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Brooke Dooley

THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Children & Youth of Friends Church

*CLOSING HYMN - No. 117 Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates

Truro

*BENEDICTION

Dan De Leon

POSTLUDE

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Instrumental Music:

Prelude: Bicinium on "Picardy" - Thomas Keesecker
Offertory: In the Bleak Midwinter - Gustav Holst, arranged by Dan Forrest Jr.
Postlude: Hark! the Herald Angels Sing with Angels We Have Heard On High -
arranged by Bernadine Johnson

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22, 2024: Micah 5:2-5a & Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

GETTING CONNECTED AT FRIENDS

GET CONNECTED! On Fridays we email out a newsletter called "This Week at Friends" that shares important information and all of the activities and events going on at Friends. Subscribe by contacting office@friends-ucc.org.

EVENTS THIS WEEK

ADVENT MEDITATION, DEC 17: You are invited to the Friends Church sanctuary to start your morning with centering meditation. At 7:30am on Tuesday, we gather for a brief introduction, followed by silent meditation, and follow-up conversation as time permits. Start to finish, this lasts between 35 and 45 minutes, hopefully allowing for those of us with work, school, and other obligations to get where we need to be on time. We are excited about this series of morning meditations that will bring us together in self- and community-preparation for the coming of Emanuel, God-With-Us, on Christmas. All are welcome.

MIDWEEK ADVENT RECITALS, DEC 18: Needing time to pause and surround yourself by the sounds of the season? If so, join us on Wednesday for a brown-bag lunch followed by a short musical program. Gather for food and fellowship at 11:30, and then stay for a 30-minute Recital of holiday music at noon, featuring the musical talents of our Friends Church musicians. We hope you can join us!

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE, DEC 18: Depression. Loneliness. Estrangement. Loss. Different life circumstances make feeling and being joyful difficult for many in our congregation and wider community during the holidays. Honoring this reality and the need for safe, inclusive space where solace and healing can breathe, a Longest Night Service will be offered at Friends Church at 6:30pm, Dec. 18. The service will move from shadows to illumination as we pray, sing, share scriptures, and hold space for one another and all needing comfort.

HELP PREP FOR CHRISTMAS EVE DEC 22: Immediately following the 11am worship service on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22, the Worship Committee will be prepping for the Christmas Eve service by changing the banners from purple to white, setting up candles, and assembling lumarias to illuminate the walkway leading up to the sanctuary. A few volunteers will make this hospitable task go much quicker. For more information contact Worship Committee Chair Charity Stokes: worship@friends-ucc.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANGEL TREE UPDATES: Angel tree presents have been delivered to the Child Protective Services office. Thank you! Thank you! To the 56 families from Friends who said “Yes” to sponsoring one or more child from the Angel Tree. It is almost magical how it all comes together to bring happiness to these 65 children. The staff from CPS greeted us at the door saying, “we know that we can always count on your church!” And with that I certainly agree. If you are still interested in helping others in our community, we are accepting gas and food gift cards in the boxes under the trees in the narthex or you may give to Michael, our administrative assistant, during office hours. Our ministers distribute these cards to families in need from our community.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR YOUTH GROUP'S 2025 MISSION TRIP PLANNING TEAM: Do you love hearing from the Friends Youth Group each year about the great work they do on their Mission Trip? How'd you like to be part of the team that ensures our Youth have the best experience possible? We are currently in need of volunteers to serve on the Planning Team for the Youth Group's 2025 Mission Trip to Denver. This includes planning fundraisers, travel, and fun activities while in Colorado. Reach out to Pastor Brooke at pastorbrooke@friends-ucc.org to be part of this important ministry.

HELP NEEDED AND APPRECIATED: SIGN CHANGER TEAM FOR DECEMBER AND NEW YEAR: Ever had a passion or interest in changing (and even suggest messages for) the church sign? Signer changers appreciated all year round, especially this month, with the end of year holiday season. This is your SIGN to learn more by connecting with Megan Alvear at evangelism@friends-ucc.org. Thank you for your consideration!

FRIENDS GREETERS NEEDED: Join our Friends Church greeter team! We are in need of additional folks to help welcome people on Sunday mornings and make our worship services flow smoothly. If you are interested in learning more, reach out to Worship Committee chair Charity Stokes at worship@friends-ucc.org. You can also sign up online here: bit.ly/FriendsGreeter.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS NEEDED: We have all the Sunday school classes covered but are still looking for volunteers who could be called when teachers are out of town to be substitutes. Please let Pastor Dan or Abby Burley, Christian_ed@friends-ucc.org, know if we can add you to our list.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AND SHARE

SUPPORT OUR PODCAST: Help us spread the good word! Share this week's sermon with those you love with our "Friends Congregational Church Sermons" podcast, available wherever you can find podcasts! Easily access and publicize our mission to follow the model of Jesus: to live faithfully, love limitlessly, and serve boldly. With over 100 episodes published (since Advent of last year) we've expanded (since Eastertide this year) our efforts to include the wider library of sermons offered before this podcast kicked off. We would love to have your support by either showing this podcast to friends and loved ones, and/or contributing your voice to introduce an episode. Volunteers can reach out to av@friends-ucc.org (Jeremy) if interested, or you might get approached after service. Recording takes less than 10 minutes and is almost entirely scripted.

Be a Greeter and Communion Steward: To help in the 9am and 11am services, please contact Worship Committee Chair Charity Stokes: worship@friends-ucc.org.

Youth Group Looking for Extra Help: We are still looking for volunteers to help with the Youth Group events for the new school year. Contact Pastor Brooke at pastorbrooke@friend-ucc.org.

Sunday School Teachers Needed: Are you feeling called to teach our children or youth? Contact Pastor Dan for more information: pastor@friends-ucc.org.

Coffee Crew/Kitchen Angel: "All I need is coffee; all we need are volunteers to make it!"

Sign up via sheet on kitchen counter, at bit.ly/friendschurchcoffee or email Jan at Fellowship@friends-ucc.org

Be a Curbside Steward: Recycling occurs once every two weeks early on Fridays and trash pick-up is weekly, early on Mondays. Bins need to be placed at the curb the afternoon or evening before the scheduled pick up day and returned to the side of the church after pick-up. Contact Property@Friends-ucc.org

Serve the Community: Help out at the Brazos Church Food Pantry, the Friday food distribution at Peace Lutheran, or Brazos Interfaith Immigration Network (BIIN) as an English or citizenship class tutor. And more! Visit the Friends Church website (Friends-ucc.org) ▶ Get **Involved** ▶ **Volunteer** or email office@friends-ucc.org for more information or to volunteer.

SAVE THE DATE

CHRISTMAS EVE AT FRIENDS CHURCH – HAND BELLS, COMMUNION, & CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT, DEC 24: Beginning at 6:30pm on Christmas Eve, the handbell choir presents a short pre-service concert of holiday music to usher in the mystery and wonder of the Christ Child's birth. Then at 7pm, the Christmas Eve service of communion and carols by candlelight is offered. The service will also be live-streamed.

CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED & UPDATES, DEC 25-27: The church office will be closed on Wednesday, Dec 25 for Christmas Day. Michael will also be on vacation from Thursday (Dec 26) and Friday (Dec 27). Please send him any updates for worship and marketing before the holiday.

Friends Congregational Church United Church of Christ

Vision:

Rooted in the way of Christ, we strive to be a community of God's radical inclusion and extravagant welcome.

Mission:

United by the example of Jesus, we live faithfully, love limitlessly, and serve boldly.

Friends Church Staff

Senior Pastor

The Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon (*he, him*)
pastor@friends-ucc.org

Director of Music Ministries

Chris Hoffman (*he, him*)
choir@friends-ucc.org

Executive Pastor

The Rev. Trent Williams (*he, him*)
pastortrent@friends-ucc.org

Associate Pastor to Youth & Young Adults

The Rev. Brooke Dooley (*she, her, they, them*)
pastorbrooke@friends-ucc.org

Administrative Assistant

Michael Rangel (*he, him*)
office@friends-ucc.org

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www.friends-ucc.org • Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 9:00–3:00
Pastor Dan's weekday off is Friday. Pastor Trent's weekday off is Monday.