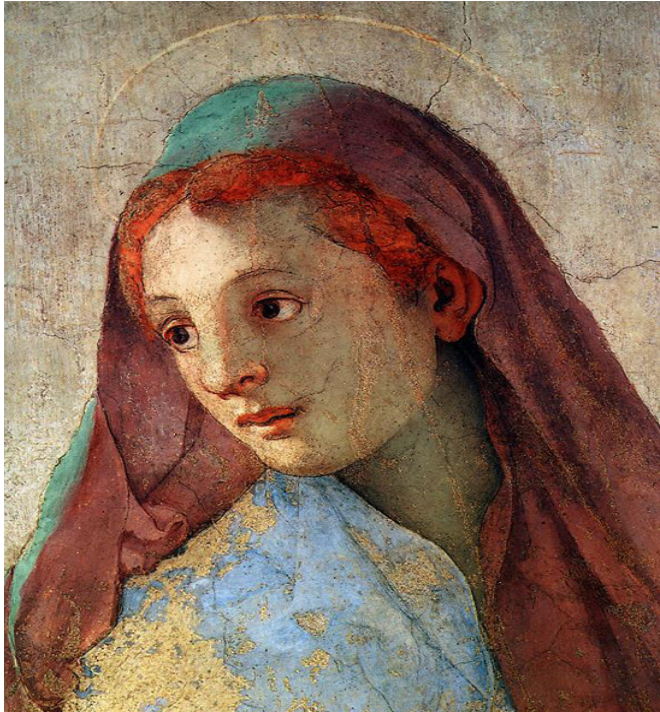




Friends Church

An Open & Affirming Congregation



Annunciation to the Virgin Mary
Jacopo da Pontormo (1527-1528)

December 24, 2023

II: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 Leader: Becky Burks
Greeter: Stacy De Leon

Next Sunday, December 31st:
Lay Leader: Tami Dudo
Greeter: Doris Machinski

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.

Fourth 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: Luke 1:46-55, NRSV

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

QUOTE FOR MEDITATION:

"For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last."

-Frederick Buechner

CHIMING OF THE TRINITY

WORDS OF WELCOME

Brooke Dooley

PRELUDE & LIGHTING OF THE ALTAR CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP

Becky Burks

*HYMN FOR LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE - LIGHT ONE CANDLE

With purpose (♩ = 88)

1 Light one can - dle for hope,
 2 Light one can - dle for peace,
 3 Light one can - dle for joy,
 4 Light one can - dle for love,

hope that the whole world needs.
 peace that the whole world needs.
 joy that the whole world needs.
 love that the whole world needs.

Light one can - dle for hope,
 Light one can - dle for peace,
 Light one can - dle for joy,
 Light one can - dle for love,

hope that the Sav - ior will bring;
 peace that the Sav - ior will bring;
 joy that the Sav - ior will bring;
 love that the Sav - ior will bring;

hope that the Sav - ior will bring.
 peace that the Sav - ior will bring.
 joy that the Sav - ior will bring.
 love that the Sav - ior will bring.

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*INVOCATION

Becky Burks

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Sue Ambrus

Children in the sanctuary are invited to come to the front, and children watching online are invited to get closer to their screen. All are invited to sing a verse of NCH #524 "This Little Light of Mine" to begin the children's message.

**This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
 Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine (oh let it shine)!**

INVITATION TO CONFESSION

Brooke Dooley

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Brooke Dooley

We watch for packages to arrive
and Christmas cards to be delivered,
but we do not always keep our eyes open
for your coming, Approaching God.
We expect our Christmas 'wish list' to be filled,
but we often fail to notice
the little, the least, the lost, the last
walking down our streets.

Forgive us, Saving God, for our misplaced priorities.
May we watch for your coming,
may we reach out to those in need,
may we wait for hope to come,
even as Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,
arrives to live in our hearts.

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

Brooke Dooley

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Brooke Dooley

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.
Many: **And also with you!**

*HYMN OF RESPONSE: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Tune: Hyfrydol

1 Come, thou long - ex - pect - ed Je - sus, born to set thy peo - ple free;
2 Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child and yet a king,

from our fears and sins re - lease us; let us find our rest in thee.
born to reign in us for - ev - er, now thy gra - cious king - dom bring.

Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art;
By thine own e - ter - nal Spir - it rule in all our hearts a - lone;

dear de - sire of ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
by thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 7:10-16, NRSV

Becky Burks

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

CHORAL ANTHEM: The Yearning - Craig Courtney

There is a yearning in hearts weighed down by ancient grief and centuries of sorrow.
There is a yearning in hearts that in the darkness hide and in the shades of death abide, a
yearning for tomorrow.

There is a yearning, a yearning for the promised One, the Firstborn of creation. There is a
yearning for the Lord who visited His own, and by His death for sin atoned, to bring to us
salvation.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, within our hearts, the yearning. Emmanuel, Emmanuel, within
our hearts, the yearning.

There is a yearning that fills the hearts of those who wait the day of His appearing. There
is a yearning when all our sorrows are erased and we shall see the One who placed within
our hearts the yearning.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, within our hearts, the yearning. Emmanuel, Emmanuel, within
our hearts, the yearning.

GOSPEL READING

Luke 1:26-38, RSV

Trent Williams

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Naza-
reth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and
the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord
is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what
sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you
have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give
to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel
said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will
overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this
is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossi-
ble." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to
your word." And the angel departed from her.

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: **God is still speaking. Thanks be to God!**

THE MESSAGE

Trent Williams

MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

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 - pare 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 our 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

Dan De Leon

*CLOSING HYMN #345 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Tune: Picardy

*BENEDICTION

Trent Williams

Go, all ye faith - ful! All who know the Sav - ior.
[Go all ye faith - ful! Take the joy* of Christ - mas.]

Car - ry the mes - sage far be - yond these walls.

Hold forth the Christ - light. Con - quer ev - ry dark - ness.

Go forth, O church of Je - sus! Pro - claim the One who frees us!

Speak peace! Reach out in mer - cy, in kind - ness and love.

* See Christmas Eve, 2023: Psalm 148:1-3

POSTLUDE

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Instrumental Music:

Prelude: Bicinium of “Picardy” - 17th Century French Melody, arranged by Thomas Keesecker

Offertory: We Wish You a Merry Christmas - arranged by A. L. Christopherson
(George, Noah, and Wolfgang Verdegaal; violins)

Postlude: Snow Lay on the Ground (Venite Adoremus), Inspired by Vivaldi’s *Lute Concerto in D Major* - Traditional English Carol, arranged by Faye López

Scriptures for Christmas Eve, 2023: Psalm 97; Luke 2:1-20

Scriptures for First Sunday after Christmas, December 31, 2023: Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

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

HANDBELL CHOIR CONCERT & CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF COMMUNION & CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT: Beginning at 6:30pm on Christmas Eve, the hand bell 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.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE PREP: On Christmas Eve, December 24th the Worship Committee invites you to help prepare the sanctuary for the Christmas Eve Service. Right after this morning’s service, we are changing the banners, changing out the colors in the Sanctuary from Purple to White, changing the ornaments to white, and putting out the candles and luminaries.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED: The church office will be closed on Monday, Dec 25th & Tuesday, Dec 26th for Christmas holiday. Normal hours resume on Wednesday, Dec 27th.

CHRISTMAS FUND MISSION OFFERING: In today’s service and tonight’s Christmas Eve service, Friends Church will take up the Christmas Fund, a mission offering of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the UCC for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to lower-income retirees. The theme for this year’s fund is “Grace Upon Grace.” Please bring a donation to the services either of these dates, or give online through our website (“One-time” donation under “Special Offerings,” and put “Christmas Fund” in the Notes).

VOLUNTEER VOICES NEEDED FOR FRIENDS CHURCH PODCAST: Our new weekly podcast, featuring the messages from Sunday worship services, is introduced by Friends Church members giving a brief testimony of what Friends Church means to them. To volunteer to introduce an episode, contact A/V Tech Jeremy Dudo at av@friends-ucc.org.

9AM SERVICES AND SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH ON BREAK: The 9am worship service and 10am Sunday School classes for children and youth, K-12, will not be offered next Sunday, December 31. All are welcome to join us for the 11am service on Dec 31st. The 9am services and Sunday School classes resume on January 7, 2024.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AND SHARE

CROCKETT ELEMENTARY BOOK FAIR: Last year our free Book Fair at Crockett Elementary School in Bryan was a great success. Each child received three books to keep. Even the teachers were able to pick two books for themselves. We are doing it again this spring, so it's time to collect books! You can donate books by placing them in the box outside the office, or you can donate gift cards or money, and we will buy books with your donations. If you have questions, please contact Jodie Robinson (jocelinbrune@gmail.com) or Pam Engler (penglertx@gmail.com). Thank you!

SHARE YOUR TIME AND TALENTS: There are plenty of opportunities for you to share your time and talents both here at the church and in the community.

Greeters and Communion Stewards Needed: If you can help with a 9am Sunday service or two, please contact Worship Committee Chair Ryan Womack: worship@friends-ucc.org.

Youth Group Looking for Extra Help: We are still looking for volunteers to help with remaining Youth Group events for the fall, including lessons, and a Christmas party. 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: Volunteer once or multiple times to prepare the coffee for the 9am or the 11am service. Contact 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

JACK'S JAZZ FEST: Jack's Jazz Fest will be held December 31 from 1-4 pm at Friends Congregational Church. This event is dedicated to one of Jack's loves, Jazz. Music was his passion and he loved learning about its history and learning to play with soulful expression. Come celebrate his life, beautiful music, participate in an art contest, a gumbo cook off, and learn from a living museum. There will be crafts, games, music, and more. There will be a silent auction, with 100% of the proceeds benefitting the youth group's summer mission trip. 28% of the t-shirt profits will benefit Wellborn Middle School Jazz Band Club. 100% of the fun will help keep his memory alive and spread awareness about the importance of mental and physical health. Visit our social media or text 979-204-5517 for more information or to sign up for the gumbo cook off or art contest. You may also purchase a t-shirt in advance for \$15 via text or at the event.

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*)
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Associate Pastor to Youth & Young Adults

The Rev. Brooke Dooley (*she, her, they, them*)
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