

2022 – 2023 Program Year Annual Report



Presented at the June 11, 2023 Annual Congregational Meeting



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From the Moderator

Cathy Hansen

You are reading the Friends Congregational Church Annual Report. Every June, at the end of our church year and now also the end of our fiscal year, the leadership team provides their summary and reflection on the previous year at Friends. In this report, you'll find a picture of where we are at this time on our collective journey in this community. Please take time to read through the reports included here and imagine where you might find a place, a team to join, or an activity that speaks to you. We welcome you and your questions and ask that you join our Friends Church family on this special journey together.

I am now completing my second year as moderator and will hand over this role to Jackie Womack who has been serving as vice moderator for two years. I've been thinking a lot about the formidable list of many of the moderators who have come before me. It has been an incredible honor to have served as moderator and to now join this list too, many of whom are still very active at Friends Church.

Kelly Wellman, Dwight Baker, Mark Thomas, Michelle Williamson, Diane Simpson, Ruth Schemmer (yes, twice), Nancy Bertsch, Kevin Graham, Andy Tag, Kathy Langlotz, Beth Becker, Anne Wehrly, Ruth Schemmer, Kate Lucchese, Robin Lucchese, David Cameron

How is it being moderator?

During the past two years serving as moderator (and two years as Vice Moderator) I have experienced many highs and some interesting challenges. The job of moderator is one that is mostly under the radar for the congregation. When I began, we had five staff including two pastors. (Now we have nine staff members including three pastors.) We had just emerged from 18 months of pandemic where we, the congregation, were represented by hundreds of pictures of us on the chairs and walls of the sanctuary. The pastors and music director were still learning about how to lead a congregation in the new hybrid reality of offering worship both live and online. Today, choir rehearsals, meetings, and programs continue to be offered and are attended in what we call a "hybrid" format. This presented many opportunities for us to learn about, grow, and expand our outreach in new ways and challenged us to think outside of the box to make this happen.

In the summer of 2021, gathering the leadership together again, in person, was like coming home. We learned that sharing space and time together was invaluable, irreplaceable, our oxygen and sustenance. We needed to be together. After 29 years or so at Friends Church I had much to learn about how it functioned as an organization. I learned that there were many opportunities for growth in the life and administration of this faith community that could no longer be managed by one or two or three people. I learned that change would become my friend and be my constant companion. I learned that there could never be enough communication.

I give my heartfelt thanks to those who were on this journey with me and who supported me during this incredibly fulfilling time as moderator. Thank you. I especially thank my wife,

Kathy. She is on that list of former moderators and knew what we were both in for. What a ride!!

Our spiritual leaders....

Our pastors and our director of music are incredible. We are blessed beyond measure that they are with us and continue to give their all to our congregation and its ministries. I urge you to take note of all of their activities, passions, gifts, and outreach. Their energies are tireless and their reach outside of our church walls in our Brazos Valley community, Heart of Texas Association, South Central Conference, Texas, United Church of Christ International and beyond is stunning, noteworthy, and “bust your buttons” making us proud! They have put Friends Congregational Church on the map in the UCC. We are known and respected for our presence and work in the Brazos Valley and beyond.

Our lay leadership team and all the faithful volunteers!

Not enough words and thank-you’s can be said to all who give of their time and talents to keep us afloat and who work tirelessly in the background to make us comfortable and welcome. We cannot function without this group of dedicated individuals who step in and step up without being asked or who show up on a moment’s notice. We are a family that cares for each other, celebrates together, and worships God with each other. We share burdens, sadness, joy-filled accomplishments, and milestones together. We are family. We are family who are friends and friends who are family. We are our chosen family.

What does it look like under the radar at Friends Church?

Friends Church has many parts that make up the machine that is kept afloat by a cadre of volunteers. There are many folks who silently make it their responsibility to take on the necessary and menial tasks of weekly maintenance, upkeep, preventative care, repair, and tending to our sweet space and grounds. The fountain/pond is cleaned and filled, the gardens are weeded with new plants placed, the toilet paper gets ordered, the dishwasher gets emptied on a Tuesday, the refrigerator gets cleaned out, the broken handles are fixed, the furniture and equipment that has been replaced is donated, the Sunday School rooms are tidied, our church sign outside gets changed, the garbage cans and recycle bins are placed on the curb and returned to their home outside the kitchen during the weekdays. There is no one person in charge of any of those items but rather they get noticed and tended to. And that is just tending to our building and grounds. You might see one of the pastors doing many of those things listed above as well.

What about Sundays? How does that happen?

We have others who volunteer to work in the AV corner and make magic with sound, visual enhancements and online production. Others sign up to be lay leaders, communion stewards, and greeters. Some are called to lead Sunday school classes, offer special music, lead the Inquiry Class, give the children’s sermon, offer a mission moment and share faith stories. There are those who bake communion bread or become sanctuary angels that make our worship space welcoming by filling the chair backs, neatening the chairs, making sure each place has a hymnal.

Others change the altar cloths and banners, add flowers, or keep the altar candles functional. Some pastor and pastor spouse types can be found polishing the altar cross and candle holders on Holy Saturday evening to be ready for Easter morning when we re-dress the altar.

What about becoming involved in our ministry and church life and faith community?

We have ministry teams who will be happy to help you find a fulfilling way to walk your journey path and to serve others both near and far. Our ministry teams support those who need food, housing, mental health care, spiritual health care, and many other needs and requests that come our way. We also care for our own who need a little assistance getting through personal and family challenges. We fellowship together while serving or just get together to share spiritual space and time. There are multiple opportunities to meet and serve people that you'll find in our weekly communication called *This Week at Friends* that is sent out by email, or you can simply call our Administrative Assistant, Michael, on weekdays between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm, or get in touch with one of our pastors or leadership team.

Our ministry teams include Nurture, Justice & Mission, Spiritual Life, Christian Education, Outreach and Evangelism, Worship, and Fellowship and are all active and wanting you to find a home with us in a meaningful way as you continue your journey in our faith community. You can find more descriptions about these on our website at www.Friends-UCC.org. Please seek one of us out. Ask. We are glad to be a part of your faith journey. No matter where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here, at Friends, with friends.

Again, thank you for being here, thank you for your support and encouragement. I am so blessed.

Cathy Hansen

Annual Meeting 2023 Report from the Senior Pastor

Submitted by Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon

While this report reflects on the last 12 months of the senior pastorate, navigating our congregation and myself through 2023 in particular has been a mixture of pain and joy that has narrowed my focus to the last five.

New Years Day found me in an ICU room with the Ives family as they said goodbye to their beloved Gary, who took his final breaths that evening. Stacy and I celebrated 20 years of marriage in January, but spent some of that time visiting my dad in a hospital following surgery. Complications from that surgery would land him back in the hospital for another two weeks and then a rehab facility. I traveled to Austin during that stretch to care for Mom and visit Dad. While emerging from those woods, I received the news that Brian Blake, a beloved, longtime member of our church, had died in his sleep. This deeply saddened our congregation and found us grieving his death at a funeral home visitation, and then celebrating his life weeks later with a service in our sanctuary. In the midst of that, my family and I went to Grand Rapids, where I preached for the installation service of a friend of mine as Senior Minister for First Congregational (Park) Church. From there, I took advantage of a continuing education opportunity in Fort Worth and returned home in time to lead Theology on Tap. Then I tested positive for covid and spent five days in isolation. When I returned to work I learned that a mentor and friend had died from sorosis of the liver, and that his ex-wife and their daughter wanted me to serve as the co-minister for a funeral for him in April. That month was a journey from a moving Holy Week and exuberant Easter, to the funeral for Rev. Dr. Stephen W. Lucas, back up to the glowing moment of a New Member Sunday on April 30, where we received nine beloved people into membership at Friends Church. One of those newest members, Jack Wiederstein, only 13 years old, would die by suicide two weeks later. The shock and grief from losing Jack remain heavy on our collective heart, as they will for a long time as we work through this low valley together. In the days after a service for Jack, that found more than 300 people spilling out of our sanctuary, my family and I shifted to honoring Mac on the occasion of his graduation from Bryan High School. During that time we learned that my 15-year-old niece, Anna, has ovarian cancer. A subsequent surgery “got it all,” and she will undergo three months of chemo starting June 12. Holding worry about Anna and the joy of Mac’s accomplishments in our hands, we watched him walk across the stage at Reed Arena on May 27, and then saw him stand alongside his Class of 2023 peers at Friends Church the next morning for Graduate Recognition Sunday, showered with applause and covered in prayer.

As I write this report on June 1, the start of Pride Month, I am exhausted with sorrow and raised up with gratitude—gratitude for everything my family, our congregation, and I have celebrated these last several months, as well as gratitude for the pain that we have walked through and will continue to walk through together, knowing that God is our companion every step of the way: our ever-present help in times of trouble, and our Friend calling us to the shore to have breakfast and celebrate new life. It’s in that tired and grateful spirit that I submit this Annual Report.

Confirmation: Confirmation 2022 began in February. I was mostly in charge of this with support from then Pastoral Intern Brooke Dooley. From July to Confirmation Sunday, Oct. 16, this involved: planning and co-leading or delegating classes; weekly communications; follow-up

correspondences from classes and field trips; working confirmands into worship leadership; helping confirmands with their Statement of Faith; and being in prayer for our confirmands, their mentors, and parents throughout the process. I'm tremendously grateful to Pastor Brooke and our Sunday School teachers for their support and co-leadership. Friends Church is justifiably proud of our six confirmands and all of the work they put into nearly nine months of Confirmation.

Theology on Tap: Since the first meeting of this ministry in May of last year, my leadership of it has involved promotion, preparing discussion topics, communicating with the venue, and facilitating. Theology on Tap resonates with those in our community yearning for social interaction, relationship-building, and informal conversations on faith and spirituality. Our October gathering found a record number of us (more than 40) at KinderHill Brew Lab with guests from Treehouse Lutherans.

Mentoring Member-in-Discernment Brooke Dooley: As mentor to (then) MID Brooke Dooley, I had the honor of introducing her at her ecclesiastical council on November 12 at the Heart of Texas Association Meeting in Weimar. While Brooke's completion of the ecclesiastical council concluded the MID process and approved her for ordination, I continued my mentoring roll by helping plan her ordination and installation service.

Mentoring Member-in-Discernment Kyle Riley: Last summer, I served as mentor to Kyle Riley with his supervised ministry course in a field setting through Duke Divinity School. Kyle led a workshop with Hope United Church of Christ, Georgetown, on deepening their Open and Affirming identity, with an emphasis on the experiences of their transgender neighbors. I was then tasked with helping Kyle in his Member-in-Discernment process through the Heart of Texas Association's Committee on Ministry (C.o.M.). Kyle became our congregation's MID on January 1. The C.o.M. then voted me in as Kyle's mentor for the remainder of his MID process, projected to conclude in fall of 2024. Since then I have arranged Kyle's monthly involvement in worship services, written recommendation letters for scholarship funds to assist him in his seminary education, and advised him through bi-weekly communications on his MID process. I connected Kyle with the Justice and Mission Committee's Reproductive Freedom working group, for which he became the coordinator, compensated by the Neighbors in Need grant they received from the national United Church of Christ. Kyle will preach his first sermon at Friends Church on July 2.

Youth Mission Trip: In July, the youth group went on their first mission trip outside B-CS since summer 2019. My involvement with the trip included leading a meeting of the youth's parents and the adult chaperones, going over the details of the trip; joining the youth for a fundraiser work day; meeting with chaperones to go over responsibilities for the trip; and communicating with parents, chaperones, youth, and our hosts at Reach Beyond Mission on various details. From July 9 to 16, I led the mission trip for our 15 youth missionaries and five adults. The days after our return involved getting left-behind items back to our youth and tracking down items left in Albuquerque, communications and visits with parents about their youth's experiences on the trip, and working with Treasurer Theresa Walker on bookkeeping and reimbursements. I led a mission trip debriefing session with our youth and adult missionaries to unpack our experiences, and to determine what we might do at home to "reach beyond" one week of mission work.

Youth-Led Worship Services: I initiated planning with a meeting of our high school missionaries and Brooke Dooley. From their ideas, I delegated tasks for the youth (e.g., preparing a land acknowledgement, writing summaries of each day of the mission trip); gathering pics and videos from the missionaries to use in the services; preparing liturgy based on what we learned on the mission trip; and communicating details to our administrative assistant, the A/V team, and the youth's parents. I organized a music troupe of instrumentalists that Mac De Leon and Abraham Guillen co-conducted with pieces they wrote and arranged, and co-coordinated and hosted four rehearsals of the music troupe. I co-led a run-through with the youth group of both services alongside Brooke and Tami Dudo. Everything came together well with the youth needing very little guidance in carrying out their parts and leading the services with confidence.

Rainbow Resource Fair: I coordinated Friends Church's participation in TAMU's LGBTQ+ Pride Center's Rainbow Resource Fair by registering our church to have a table at the event; writing an announcement soliciting volunteers to staff our table; communicating details to those volunteers; attending the event on September 8 in the MSC; and promoting our table at the RRF via the church's social media. Trent and Michael helped get resources for the table, and Trent joined me at the event in providing a pastoral presence. Over 500 people attended, and several visited Friends Church's table. Guests to our worship services afterwards cited the RRF or the TAMU LGBTQ+ Pride Center as the reason for their visit.

Youth Ministry: From the conclusion of last summer's mission trip to the start of this year, I moved more youth ministry responsibilities from my plate to then Pastoral Intern Brooke Dooley's in preparation for her being called to a more permanent Associate Pastor position at Friends Church. In July, I participated in the Independence Day party for youth and families. On October 30, I co-led the youth group's venture to Covenant Presbyterian Church, where they joined the youth groups of CPC and First Presbyterian, Bryan, for a Halloween party. On November 14, I participated in the youth group's "takeover" of the food distribution ministry at Peace Lutheran Church. On November 16, I participated in the youth group's leadership of our church's CROP Hunger Walk team. On November 17, I volunteered with the youth group at the Brazos Valley Mobile Food Pantry where nearly 500 households were served. March 25-26, I attended the youth group's 30-Hour Famine. On April 30, I led Youth Group for the high schoolers. After the service for Jack Wiederstein, I joined the youth at the Abbott home to hold that space with them and assess how we were doing mentally and emotionally. With Pastor Brooke, I coordinated Graduate Recognition Sunday on May 28.

Committee on Ministry: Last summer I started a three-year term on the Heart of Texas Association's Committee on Ministry. The C.o.M. oversees ordination, licensure, and the Member-in-Discernment process. It also fields complaints brought against ministers in our association to determine whether those complaints merit a fitness review or lesser course of action.

Texas Impact Board of Directors: In July, I began serving on the Texas Impact Board of Directors as one of two representatives of the United Church of Christ. Texas Impact is an interfaith advocacy group that equips faith leaders and their congregations with information, opportunities, and outreach tools to educate their communities and engage with lawmakers on pressing public policy issues. Texas Impact helps people live out their faith in the public square,

moving the faith community from charity to justice. Note: MID Kyle Riley currently serves as an intern for Texas Impact.

The Journey: Alongside Pastor Trent, Church Council members Cathy Hansen, Jodie, Robinson, and Sue Ambrus, and a handful of other Friends Church members, I contributed to the leadership team for the spiritual renewal retreat North Texas Journey #17 at Camp Crucis in Granbury, TX, September 29 - October 2. My involvement as a clergy leader included giving a talk (similar to a sermon), providing pastoral care as needed, assisting with music, and transporting the three participants from Friends Church to and from the retreat. Additionally, to allow for both Trent and me to be gone for an entire weekend including Sunday morning, I assisted our ministerial and administrative staff in making sure everything was covered in our absence.

Morning Meditations for Advent: Each Tuesday in Advent, I led a 7:30am meditation in the sanctuary. This involved preparing a guided meditation, setting up the chairs, preparing music, having coffee ready, leading the meditations, and rearranging the sanctuary afterwards. The four meditations were attended by 10-15 people.

Advent Conspiracy Midweek Discussions: For the four weeks of Advent, I led discussions on a curriculum called the Advent Conspiracy in the midweek evenings. This involved reading the *Advent Conspiracy* book, previewing the discussion videos, preparing presentations and discussion questions, setting up the chairs and A/V cart in the sanctuary, setting up coffee and snacks, leading the discussions, and taking down. The midweek gatherings were attended by a well-engaged group of 15 to 30.

The Longest Night Service: My involvement in this ministry to our church and the wider community included preparing the liturgy for the service; finding lay leaders; communicating with the Worship Committee and A/V team re: set-up, in-house audio needs and live-streaming details; co-leading the service; providing one-on-one prayer with service attendees after the service; and taking down. I promoted the service by sharing it with the Faith-Based Leaders of Bryan ISD, writing about it in my monthly column for The Eagle, and working with Evangelism Chair Kenshi Westover to produce a graphic for it and the other Advent and Christmas offerings from the church.

Christmas Day Service: Friends Church and this pastor are blessed to have a staff serving on Christmas morning when it happens to fall on a Sunday. My involvement in that special service included preparing the liturgy, coordinating the baptisms for Saige Torres and Tony Torres, offering music on guitar, providing the children's message, and co-leading the service alongside the ministerial staff. Upon request of KBTX, I invited a reporter to attend the service and gave an interview afterwards. It was another blessing to have our church family featured on the news Christmas afternoon and evening.

Conversations Retreat: In January, I attended a retreat in St. Pete Beach, Florida, for senior ministers of multi-staff UCC congregations. The retreat was attended by more than 40 UCC senior pastors from across the country. Rev. Dr. Amy Butler, the former senior minister of the historic Riverside Church in New York, led our discussions. We also had opportunities for small

group discussions, worship together, and much-needed free time. I selected and led the music for our worship services. I am grateful for this opportunity for insight, rest, renewal, and perspective, as well as for a congregation with resources and support allowing for their senior pastor to attend it.

MLK Book Study: On January 18 at the Lincoln Center, I led a study of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s book *Strength to Love*. This involved communicating with the LC's coordinator, finding a Black-owned bookseller (with great help from Michael Rangel) to obtain books to make available locally, promoting the event at Friends Church and in the wider community (interviews with KBTX and KRHD, social media), re-reading the book, preparing a presentation and discussion questions, and leading the study.

Brooke Dooley's Ordination & Installation Service: The service of ordination and installation for Rev. Brooke Dooley was an inspiring watershed moment. My involvement included helping Brooke prepare the liturgy; collecting letters of affirmation and finding speakers to read them; coordinating the acquiring of gifts (robes, stoles, etc.) with the Moderator and Deputy Moderator of Programs; communicating with the Worship Committee, Brooke's pastoral relations team, and with the Association Minister, Conference Minister, Church Council Moderator, and laity about their involvement in the service; and co-leading the service.

Brian Blake: On the morning of February 2, I learned that Brian Blake had died in his sleep during the night. I called some of Brian's closest friends in the congregation about this, and then wrote an email to the church breaking the awful news. Later that morning, I sat with Chris Gibson, Brian's husband, in their home alongside two church members and another couple of Chris' close friends. I offered a prayer to conclude the visitation for Brian on February 10 at Callaway-Jones Funeral Home. After that, I met with Chris and some of his closest friends to begin planning the celebration of life service for Brian, which was held at Friends Church on March 25.

Holy Week & Easter: I prepared the **Maundy Thursday service** and worked with the staff, A/V team, and worship committee to offer it at Friends Church on April 6. With Chris Hoffman unavailable, I led most of the music on guitar. After offering prayer with the choir prior to the **Good Friday service**, I served with Stacy as a greeter, which gave me a powerful glimpse of the GF service: watching more than 100 people leave the sanctuary in silence and stand outside the church, still mostly silent, reflecting on the Passion of Christ and holding vigil. The staff, worship committee, and I put together the **Easter services**, with awesome support from the A/V team. One church member, who attended both services said, "That was probably the best worship experience I've ever participated in. The Spirit was moving big time." It was the first time for me to preach for Easter inside the sanctuary with in-person attendance in four years.

Vacation Bible School: Friends Church will offer its first VBS in 17 years from June 12 to 16 each morning for preK to 5th grade. My involvement in bringing this to fruition has been researching and acquiring curriculum; coordinating a planning team; writing announcements to prepare and promote it; and attending three planning meetings.

Other Pastoral tasks

- Providing assistance to walk-in neighbors
- Worship service and liturgy planning
- Sermon study and writing
- Maintaining the church's social media platforms
- Weekly follow-up with guest requests
- Writing Midweek Message devotionals
- Pastoral care and counseling (in person, Zoom, email, phone, text)
- Preparing and leading two Servant Leader Summits for all FCC leaders
- Leading weekly staff meetings
- Planning and co-leading Ash Wednesday services
- Mental Health First Aid training
- Five weddings
- Ex-officio member of the Nominating Committee
- Home and hospital visits
- Six funerals
- Co-leadership of an Inquiry Class
- South Central Conference Clergy Retreat and Annual Meeting

Evangelism, Outreach, Community Involvement

- Monthly columns for The Eagle every third Saturday
- Bryan ISD Faith-based Leaders quarterly meetings
- Brazos Valley Food Bank's Feast of Caring
- BISD Convocation
- Relocation task force meetings at CS City Hall
- Traces of the Trade documentary screening and discussion, Brazos Center
- Guest speaker for United Campus Ministry
- Panelist on "Called to Care" interfaith panel at GIFT Festival, Austin
- Guest speaker offering "Motivational Moment" at Lincoln Center
- Music and outreach at Pride Community Center's Big Gay BBQ
- Clergy liaison (emcee) for CROP Hunger Walk, Veterans Park
- Remarks at TDOR (Transgender Day of Remembrance) Vigil
- MLK Day march
- Groundbreaking ceremony for BISD's Ruby Haliburton Auxiliary Complex
- B-CS Habitat For Humanity Community Builders Breakfast
- Habitat for Humanity "Run for the House" 5K
- Brazos Valley Home Ownership Coalition presentation at CS City Hall
- Spiritual Care Network meeting with a presentation from the Sexual Assault Resource Center at Brazos Valley Council of Governments
- Co-organized and facilitated the Faith Leaders for Justice Group meeting at Middleway Urban Monastery.
- Provided guitar and singing leadership for "sing-in" protest of SB 14 outside House chambers at the Capitol

Executive Pastor's 2023 Report

Looking back over the past year fills me with multiple emotions: gratitude, wonder, sadness, pride, hope. This has been a year filled with growth and change, with loss and new life—for me, and for our congregation. I am most of all grateful to be ministering with you and among you, and so appreciate the ways that you all have continued to be the church—living passionately, loving faithfully, serving boldly.

Over this past year, we have accomplished some major milestones as a church community: we shifted our fiscal year to match our program year, we retired our remaining mortgage debt, we called an Associate Pastor to lead our youth and young adults, we hired new AV and childcare workers, and we have partnered with a stewardship consultant to help take us to the next level in generosity so that we can continue to fulfill our mission and our dreams. These are amazing accomplishments, and it is thanks to the dedication and commitment of our community that we have achieved these goals. As we continue to live into them and stretch ourselves even further in the year ahead, I'm more confident than ever that we can achieve things that we never imagined possible.

As your Executive Pastor, I continue to lead in areas of stewardship and finance, property, personnel, and technology and digital ministry. We are excited about the possibilities for continuing to grow our generosity, and set a strong foundation for the future. This past year, we were able to move one of our endowment funds to local management, and look forward to continuing to grow that ministry as we focus on planned giving in the year ahead. We also have strong visions for this year's stewardship drive, as we focus on growing our AV capabilities, expanding musical offerings, improving accessibility, and continuing to support our growing ministry with youth and young adults.

I also continue to work closely with the Spiritual Life team as they oversee spiritual formation opportunities for adults through inquiry classes, adult Sunday school, the Book Club, seasonal devotionals, and small groups. We know the power and the necessity of forging those relationships, and how transformative they can be. As we've lost some dear and beloved members of our community this past year, I'm reminded more than ever of how much these relationships and connections mean. I'm hopeful that we will be able to offer more congregation-wide small groups in the coming year that will give everyone the opportunity to get to know people and deepen their relationships across the congregation.

This past year I have also continued my service on the South Central Conference Board of Directors; I was elected Vice President in 2021, and completed the second year of that term just a few weeks ago at Annual Meeting. At that meeting, I was elected President, and will serve in that capacity through Annual Meeting 2025. This has been a tumultuous and challenging year in our Conference, and I've been challenged in ways I would not have imagined when I entered that office. In November of last year, the Board made the difficult decision to begin exploring alternatives for Slumber Falls Camp and Retreat Center, including the possibility of selling the property. Slumber Falls has been operating at a loss for more than a decade, and it was no longer financially possible for the Conference to continue absorbing those losses. This process of exploration led to a lawsuit being filed against the Conference by five clergy colleagues, and a

protracted legal process as we navigated finding the best solution. Ultimately, at this year's Annual Meeting, the Conference delegates voted overwhelmingly to affirm the board's recommendation to sell Slumber Falls to a hospitality business that will preserve the natural green space, put \$500,000 into renovating and upgrading the cabins, and make the property available to UCC churches every summer for use at a substantial discount. The proceeds from the sale will help fund the ministries of the Conference, including a new endowment for regional outdoor ministry across Texas and Louisiana.

At this year's Annual Meeting, we also took a vote that was profoundly moving for me personally: in a unanimous vote, the South Central Conference became an Open & Affirming Conference in the United Church of Christ. As someone that grew up in this conference at a time when that would have been unimaginable, I am deeply grateful to have been able to witness that moment, and to be able to help lead our conference in living into that decision in the next few years. Thank you, Friends Church, for paving the way for this moment by being the very first congregation in our conference to become Open & Affirming!

With hope and gratitude,
Pastor Trent

Associate Pastor of Youth and Young Adults Report

Submitted by Pastor Brooke

Along with general worship planning, since being installed I have offered the sermon for February 5, Palm/Passion Sunday, April 16, and Pentecost/Graduate Recognition Sunday. I continue to be on a rotation for providing midweek messages and children's messages and enjoy the opportunity to awaken the puppets. Youth activities this year have included lessons and outings for Black History Month and Women's History Month, movie nights, joining the Social Justice class to discuss Mary Magdalene, birthday gatherings, a guest speaker who spoke with them about immigration history, 30 Hour Famine, and a youth and families cookout for fellowship, as well as youth group and mission trip planning. Following the difficult loss of Jack Wiederstein, the youth group gathered for an opportunity to check-in and discuss anything they might be juggling. For the mission trip, I'm still working on getting all the paperwork submitted for youth and adult participants and gathering information on service sites and curricula. I am in the process of planning for an extra day in Tulsa for the youth to have a fun activity after their mission week, they will be visiting the Tulsa Zoo. We have also organized fundraisers for the mission trip. Our first fundraiser was held after the Graduate Recognition Service, 5/28. It was a trivia event, which was put together with the help of wonderful volunteers who provided food, offered prizes from local businesses, and helped set up and put everything back together. We hope to offer more trivia events in the future. Our second fundraiser will be a variety show showcasing the talents of the youth, as well as a silent auction with items donated by youth and other members of the church. This will be held on Saturday, June 17. Our next youth gathering is an end of the school year lunch, 6/4, where we will also celebrate our May/June youth birthdays. Parents and youth continue to receive weekly youth updates related to their schedule.

As a co-facilitator of the Pride Community Center LGBTQ+ Youth Support Group, I have helped to organize game nights and craft nights for LGBTQ+ youth and allies. The youth have expressed the importance of having those spaces, and an interest in starting a peer support group. Our next group outing is scheduled for June 3rd, they will be going to see the Spongebob Musical at The Theatre Company. I am continuing to work with Allison Faber at the UU church, and Katy Stewart on a collaborative effort to bring OWL to B/CS. We are still hoping to arrange a local training in the fall. I received a list of available trainers, and so far we have three people who have availability in September, so we are currently looking at that. We are still working on a budget and have a few fundraising ideas.

The 20/30 Somethings have so far met for two potlucks and a trivia outing. There is still more I hope to do with the young adults, but scheduling presents some difficulties, particularly with everything happening with the youth in preparation for their mission trip. We do have a couple young adult volunteers going on the mission trip, and I look forward to their presence and leadership.

Music Ministry Activities

By Chris Hoffman, Director of Music Ministries

The 2022-2023 year was filled with wonderful, moving, and reverent musical offerings. This year marks my 17th anniversary of serving at Friends, and I am continually reminded of what wonderful people we have volunteering their time and talents to augment and uplift the spiritual life at Friends.

Chancel Choir Activities

The Chancel Choir started rehearsing in August, after their annual summer sabbatical, and resumed singing in Sunday services on August 21, with John Leavitt's uplifting and exciting "Festival Sanctus." The Choir continued to sing for almost every Sunday in the fall, taking the second Sunday off each month for the Handbell Choir to ring. Other anthems performed in the fall that were wide-spread favorites included "Angels Unaware" by Pepper Choplin, "I Believe" by Mark A. Miller, "Look at the World" by John Rutter, "Refuge" by Keith Christopher, "Siyahamba" arranged by Ruth Morris Gray (for World Communion Sunday, and accompanied only by percussion), "I Will Be a Child of Peace" by Elaine Hagenberg, "Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal" arranged by Alice Parker (for All Saints Sunday), "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" arranged by Joel Raney (for Advent, and accompanied only by handbells), and "O Come, Emmanuel" by Elaine Hagenberg (also for Advent).

The annual Christmas Cantata took place on Thursday, December 8, at 7:30 pm. This year, the Choir performed "A Night for Rejoicing," a Cantata composed by Lee Dengler and Susan Naus Dengler. The Choir collaborated with a seven-piece Chamber Orchestra consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, violoncello (that's the formal name for the cello), percussion, and piano. Narration between the musical movements added to the Christmas story, and were read by members of our Congregation. Additionally, the Congregation had opportunities to sing along, filling the sanctuary with the wonderful and thrilling sounds of the season. As always, this Cantata was followed by a fabulous reception. Thank you to all involved, for making this a very special and festive evening. When getting feedback from those in attendance, I was humbled and honored that this service brought joy into the hearts of some who very much needed it this year. Those feelings of hope, peace, love, and joy are exactly why we minister through music.

After a short break, the Chancel Choir resumed rehearsals in January. Their first Sunday back was January 22, with two different services. In addition to singing for the regular service, the Chancel Choir came back later in the afternoon to celebrate the Ordination of one of our Altos – Brooke Dooley. The Choir sang the anthem that was the first anthem she ever sang with the group – "Here I Am, Lord" arranged by Jack Schrader. The singing was passionate, and elicited a couple "wows" from the Congregation.

Other favorite anthems in the spring, up to the time of this report include: "Be Thou My Vision" by John Ferguson, "Send Out Thy Light" by Mily Balakireff, "O Nata Lux" by Morten Lauridsen (for Transfiguration Sunday), "I Lift My Eyes" by Dan Forrest, "Kyrie" by John Leavitt, and "The Lord is My Shepherd" by Howard Goodall.

Holy Week continued to be a busy marathon of a week for musicians, and the Chancel Choir rose to the challenge. On Good Friday (April 7), they performed Théodore Dubois' "The Seven Last Words of Christ." The first and only other time the group sang this was in 2017, and the Choir was much smaller then. Our now larger Choir was joined by a Chamber Orchestra of twelve – flute, oboe, timpani, harp, organ, four violins, viola, violoncello, and double bass. This work also required some very heavy lifting of three solo roles – soprano, tenor, and baritone. Special thanks goes to Cathy Hansen, soprano; David Manuel, tenor; and Tom Vogel, baritone – they sang roles that are typically covered by paid professionals magnificently. Much like the Christmas Cantata, this performance moved many. This Good Friday Cantata definitely ranks in the top five of all the ones I have conducted at Friends Church.

Of course, music for Holy Week led to joyful and robust sounds of "Alleluia" in the sanctuary for Easter (April 9). The Chancel Choir carried those Alleluias into their anthem and sang an amazing arrangement of "Crown Him!" by Dan Forrest. The Soprano part was almost entirely a descant, and the Altos had the melody almost the entire time (you're welcome, dear Altos). At the end of the service, I decided to play Handel's "Hallelujah" Chorus from "Messiah" for my Postlude, and turned it into a pop-up event. The Choir sang (some members even got to sight-read, having never had the opportunity to sing this staple of choral repertoire before), and many members of the Congregation joined in with their voices, while the music scrolled on the TV monitors (many thanks to the AV team for fulfilling that request, no easy task!).

On a serious note, we are seeing incidents of Choirs being cut from churches for various reasons (that is a topic for a completely different day). We are so blessed to have a Congregation and Staff that supports this wonderful ensemble at Friends. We are also so blessed to have so many feel the call to lend their voices to this group. As a result, the Chancel Choir is bigger than it has ever been. When every member is present, we have 40 singers (our numbers were in the twenties last year, so this is an incredible jump). While the Choir loft is now very full on most Sundays, don't let that deter you from joining us. If you wish to sing with the Friends Choir, please come talk to me. We will get a chair for you!

Finally, I wish to honor two members of the Choir. At the beginning of February, we lost one of our beloved Baritones - Brian Blake. His passing was very sudden, and we are still processing the loss. We continue to mourn his passing and uplift his husband Chris Gibson in love and prayers. We were able to celebrate his life – his extravagant welcome and acceptance of all, his humor, his servant heart, to name a few traits – with a Memorial Service on March 25. The Choir honored him by singing the final movement to John Rutter's "Requiem," an ethereal piece in which Brian got to sing in its entirety with the Choir at Carnegie Hall in February of 2019, before COVID shut everything down.

I also wish to honor long-time Choir member Maggie Gartner. Maggie joined the church shortly after I started at Friends, and has served as a reliable singer in the Soprano section. She would often show new members the ropes, and her fellow Sopranos could always count on her to nail intervals. She was also so gracious as to open her home to the Chancel Choir and Handbell Choir on Easter Sundays, providing an elaborate brunch for us all, between services. Maggie recently moved to Washington to be closer to family, and while we are still mad that she moved, we are happy knowing she is where she is supposed to be – but we miss her terribly.

Handbell Choir Activities

Our Handbell Choir this year has been absolutely wonderful, and has really become a cohesive ensemble. They resumed their Monday night rehearsals in August, and resumed their tradition of ringing every second Sunday of the month, beginning on September 11. They announced their return with a fun arrangement of “I’m Just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger” arranged by Tammy Waldrop. This piece used various handbell techniques, including the use of mallets (which the members love to do, and wanted more pieces that incorporated mallets). This piece also allowed us to debut our new handchimes. More on that later.

Another very special handbell piece was rung on November 13. Michael Helman composed a very special work called “Prayer for the Innocents.” Originally written in memory of those who lost their lives during the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, the composer further elaborated that this piece is dedicated to anyone who has been the victim of hate, violence, or intolerance. I am also grateful to see this particular sacred music publishing company, Lorenz, support the publishing of a piece that is dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ population. You rarely find pieces with this type of dedication in their catalogs. This piece will make repeat appearances, when the moment calls for it.

The biggest project that the Handbell Choir takes on is its pre-Christmas Eve service concert. This is a newer tradition at Friends, and the group worked very hard at performing a mixture of pieces that are audience favorites along with pieces that are not as well-known. It was a beautiful way to set up the Christmas Eve service, and for those who come from a background of listening to and/or ringing handbells, this provides a sense of nostalgia.

The Handbell Choir got to have a short break after Christmas Eve, and resumed rehearsals in late January. In February they rang a laid-back version of “Every Time I Feel the Spirit” arranged by Patricia Hurlbutt, and in March they rang a beautiful piece for Lent called “Go to Dark Gethsemane” arranged by Jeffrey Honoré.

For Easter (April 9), the Handbells performed a great arrangement of “Joyful, Joyful” arranged by Cynthia Dobrinski. This Easter performance showcased a group that has come a long way in terms of being able to handle more difficult music. They also have found a wonderful sense of cohesion, and are even better at listening to one another. I am so proud of their evolution as a fairly young ensemble at Friends.

On a slightly different note (pun intended?): in last year’s Annual Report, I mentioned the wish to add a set of handchimes to match our four-octave handbell set. Over the summer, a very generous anonymous donor donated the exact amount of money needed to purchase a four-octave set of handchimes. Thanks to the generosity of the donor, we were able to begin adding handchimes into the handbell pieces.

Currently, we have four octaves of bells at our disposal. However, we only have enough people to utilize three of those four octaves. We would LOVE to have more handbell ringers, in order to fill out the ensemble’s sound even more. If you would like to join us, we can train you. If you

can count, and recognize two notes on a staff (seriously), we can train you with the rest. Despite how impressive the group looks ringing, the technique is not as hard as you think.

Other Musical Offerings

There are Sundays that neither the Chancel Choir nor the Handbell Choir perform. There is an occasional Sunday during the academic year when both groups are out, but the bigger breaks happen after Christmas and in the summer. We are blessed to have various instrumental soloists, vocal soloists, and even small ensembles and a praise band contribute music during these times. Much appreciation goes out to all of you, for adding to the beautiful and varied musical offerings here at Friends Church.

As we finish out this year, and head into the summer, I eagerly await the time I get to spend in July to plan the music for next year. I say it often, but the sincerity is still there: we are truly blessed to have as many individuals as we do who so graciously give their time and talent to shape the musical life at Friends. They bring their gifts, and willingly explore how to grow and diversify their musical offerings. They are not afraid to push themselves, and the congregation gets to be the direct recipient of their hard work. We truly have one of the best programs in town, and it excites me every year to see how we can raise the bar time and time again, bringing our best and authentic selves to praising God and serving others through our music.

Thank you for continuing to put your faith and trust in me as your Director of Music Ministries. I cherish this position, and am so grateful to be a part of the Friends family.

Treasurer Report
Theresa Walker, Treasurer

Friends Church began 2022 by passing a \$488,524 expenditure budget with revenue projections of \$440,520. The year ended with a net total of (\$10,183.67).

General Operating Funds

General funds are unrestricted and are used in the general operations of the church. In 2022, pledges, offerings, and miscellaneous income collected was \$454,883.13 which represented 103% of budgeted revenue. Revenue collected in 2022 exceeded 2021 collections by 8%. In 2022, operating expenses of \$465,066.80 represented 95% of budgeted expenditures. Operating expenses in 2022 exceeded 2021 expenditures by approximately 15%.

2022 ended with a net total of (\$10,183.67). Funds from the 2021 \$17,189 surplus was designated to cover this shortfall. Below is the breakdown of the 2022 Income and Expenses:

Income	2022 Totals
Pledges	\$318,600.72
Offerings	\$133,954.94
Other Income	\$ 2,327.47
Total	\$454,883.13
Expenses	2022 Totals
Administrative	\$ 93,985.60
Programs	\$ 17,642.49
Trustees	\$ 353,438.71
Total	\$ 465,066.80
Net Total	(\$ 10,183.67)

Restricted Funds

Restricted funds are monies set aside for a particular purpose as directed by the giver. Restricted fund balances are carried over from year to year. Below is a breakdown of restricted funds income and disbursements:

Income	Totals
One Time Funds	\$ 15,524.50
Youth Mission Trip	\$ 12,476.95
Building Repair/Restoration	\$ 7,334.93
Pastors Discretionary	\$ 2,050.00
Music Ministry	\$ 2,000.00
Children's Collection	\$ 104.93
Mortgage Principal Giving	\$ 53,202.37
Jubilee Fund	\$ 257.60
SCC Christmas Fund	\$ 1,503.00
SCC Neighbors in Need	\$ 1,846.00
SCC One Great Hour of Sharing	\$ 130.00

SCC Strengthen the Church	\$ 1,275.00
Total	\$ 97,785.28

Disbursements	Totals
One Time Fund	\$ 15,817.15
Crisis Fund	\$ 1,830.00
Music Ministry	\$ 1,407.74
Youth Mission Trip	\$ 14,995.46
Major Repairs	\$ 2,850.00
Journey	\$ 175.00
Jubilee Fund Disbursement	\$ 1,119.98
Mortgage Principal	\$ 57,343.89
SCC Christmas Fund	\$ 1,135.00
SCC Neighbors in Need	\$ 1,846.00
SCC One Great Hours of Sharing	\$ 120.00
SCC Strengthen the Church	\$ 1,265.00
Total	\$ 99,905.22

Other Funds

Throughout 2022, the congregation has financially supported many non-profits and causes. This support came through Crop Walk, Annual Dues, Love collections, Directed Giving as well as other efforts. Below is a list of those non-profits and our financial support:

Brazos Interfaith Immigration Network	\$ 755.00
Brazos Church Pantry	\$ 525.00
Brazos Valley Food Bank	\$ 500.00
CWS Crop Walk	\$ 155.00
Family Promise of College Station	\$ 800.00
Heart of Texas Association	\$ 2,032.44
Tiny Hope Village	\$ 1,119.98
United Campus Ministry	\$ 1,750.56
Texas Impact	\$ 100.00
Rest in Peace Medical Debt Relief	\$ 8,117.00
United Church of Christ Disabilities	\$ 100.00
Brazos Valley African American Museum	\$ 105.10

We also maintained our 5 for 5 status with the SCC. Our giving for 2022 was as follows:

Christmas Fund	\$ 1,135.00
Neighbors in Need	\$ 1,846.00
One Great Hour of Sharing	\$ 120.00
Strengthen the Church	\$ 1,265.00
OCWM	\$ 7,046.00

Operating Reserves

The Reserves Account is Friend's Emergency Fund. In 2021, Church Council authorized an additional \$37,500 from prior years surplus to be added to the existing \$50,000 reserves account. This fund was transferred to the United Church Fund. The balance as of April 30, 2023 was \$89,826.39.

Capital Funds

In June of 2022, Church Council launched a campaign to retire the balance of the \$64,000 mortgage debt. Over \$56,000 in donations were received and applied directly toward the principal of the loan. The debt was paid in full in December 2022.

Investment Funds

The fund of \$60,000 was invested in the United Church Funds in 2021. The balance at 12/31/22 was \$51,500.99. Unfavorable market conditions due to the pandemic and inflation concerns caused the fund to decrease in the latter part of 2022. Church Council elected in 2023 to move those funds and reinvest locally with Fries Financial Services through Ameritrade Institutional. The balance as of 4/30/23 was \$53,161.26.

The Jubilee Fund with an initial investment of \$12,050 was invested in UCC Cornerstone Fund. These funds earn interest, which will be given to a charitable cause every 7 years. During 2022, accumulated interest of \$1,119.98 was donated to Tiny Hope Village. At the end of year 49, the fund principal will be distributed to a charitable cause. Fund Balance at 4/30/23 was \$12,685.74

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at treasurer@friends-ucc.org.

Church Snapshot As of April 30, 2023

Outstanding Loans

Mortgage	\$ -0-
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Available Funds

General Operating	\$ 45,314.46
Restricted	\$ 75,261.47
UCF Fund Cash Reserves	\$ 89,826.39
Ameritrade Fixed/Equity	\$ 53,161.26
Jubilee Fund	\$ 12,685.74
Total	<u>\$ 276,249.32</u>

Note: There are two promissory notes held by the Local Church Ministries of the UCC. The amounts are approximately \$20,000.00 and \$86,293.00. We will only be required to repay these notes if we sell our land and building, leave the UCC, or no longer use the facility for our ministry. In 2021, we did not make a payment toward this commitment.

Deputy Moderator of Programs Report

What a year it has been! As you will see below, our Programs committees have been busy serving our church, our community, and beyond. Very sadly, we lost our Fellowship Chair, Brian Blake, this year. Brian and his husband, Chris, were tireless in their work to make sure all gatherings went well and that we were all fed. Brian had great ideas, and he made us all laugh at our meetings. We miss him. After losing Brian, our current Chairs and many from our church family stepped up and make sure our gatherings had plenty of food and refreshment. Thank you all for being there when needed. I also want to thank all our committee chairs and members who worked hard this year to serve Friends Church and its ministries with great love and extravagant welcome! I am so grateful that I could serve with all of you wonderful, loving friends.

Jodie Robinson

Justice and Mission Committee

Chairs: Martha Newsome—July-Feb

Cecelia Hawkins, Anne Wehrly, Laura Wimberley- March-June

Committee Attendees: Becky Burks, Cady Engler, Pam Engler, Linda Fitzwater, Mary Howell, Grace Jackson, Sally Manthei, Andrew McNeely, Kyle Riley, Peggy Vitek, Doris Machinski, Kathy Yeager, Theresa Walker, Kelly Wellman, & Evan Weiss.

MINISTRIES UNDERTAKEN in 2022-23 with identified leadership

FOOD INSECURITY

- Brazos Church Pantry volunteering & donation of food and feminine hygiene products—Becky Burks, Andrew McNeely (monthly food distribution)
- Brazos Valley Food Bank Produce Distribution with Peace Lutheran – Anne Wehrly (weekly)
- Feast of Caring - donation only—Brazos Food Bank
- Crop Walk – Brazos Church Pantry – Pastor Dan and youth

AFFORDABLE HOUSING/The UNHOUSED

- Family Promise - Anne Wehrly, Mary Howell, Sally Manthei (quarterly)
- Back Bay Mission hygiene kit collection (celebrating 100 years of ministry on the Gulf Coast)- Anne Wehrly
- Tiny Hope Village volunteering & donation – Cady Engler
- Motel food delivery (temporary until Tiny Hope residence is complete) Doris Machinski

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Crockett Elementary School staff/teacher appreciation and no cost book fair – Pam Engler, Jodie Robinson
- Festival of Giving Tree (Angel Tree) - Anne Wehrly, Mary Howell
- Church World Service school kits collection – Martha Newsome, Anne Wehrly

- UPAVIM –Fair Trade Craft Sale supporting children and women in Guatemala –Barb Lorraine, Theresa Walker, Anne Wehrly

IMMIGRATION/IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATION

- Brazos Interfaith Immigration Network – Nancy Plankey-Videla, Doris Machinski, Linda Fitzwater
- Courts and Ports (Texas Impact interfaith learning opportunity provided on the Texas/Mexico border)—tentatively planned for summer, 2023-Cecelia Hawkins

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE – Cecelia Hawkins, Grace Jackson, Kyle Riley, Laura Wimberley

- Obtained Neighbors in Need (NIN) grant through the national UCC -Cecelia Hawkins
- Spearheaded the move for Friends to obtain the designation as a Reproductive Freedom Congregation through Just Texas—Congregational Vote 1/20/23—Laura Wimberley, Peggy Vitek, Cecelia Hawkins, Grace Jackson
- Jane's Due Process – volunteering
- Community Conversation on Reproductive Health- Cecelia Hawkins, Grace Jackson, Kyle Riley, (2/26/23).

RACIAL JUSTICE

Traces of the Trade – one- time event with other faith communities in B/CS 9/27/22.

FAITH INCLUSION AND DISABILITY AWARENESS – Pam Engler. Doris Machinski

- Mental Health FIRST AID Training (Joe Hartsoe provided training)— one-time event as part of our designation as a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, & Engaged) congregation (3/29/23).
- Access Sunday-Doris Machinski & Pam Engler

SUSTAINABILITY – Kelly Wellman

- Promote sustainability by maintaining recycling containers throughout the church

During April-June, 2023, the Justice & Mission Committee spent time as a committee of the whole carefully evaluating all of the current ministries in which it is engaged and determined which ones should continue going forward into 2023-24.

Annual Report Nurture Committee 2022-2023 Submitted by Kristin Harper

The Nurture Committee coordinates and assists the care and nurture of Church members and friends of the congregation. The Committee has not held formal meetings. However, many individuals have taken leadership of programs and events, as listed below.

Groups

Guyz Breakfast – First Saturday of the month, at 8:30 a.m. at the church. This has changed, beginning in June of 2023, to the second Saturday of the month, starting at 9:00 a.m. Bill Harper and Cady Engler coordinate this activity.

Fabulous at Any Age – This group meets for activities on a regular basis, using a 3–4-month schedule of events. Laura Wimberley helped make the schedule, with input from Dwight and June Baker, Linda Fitzwater and Anne Wehrly.

Wonderful Wednesdays with Women – On the second Wednesday of the month, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. we meet in a local bar or restaurant for “happy hour” type activity. The locations vary, with establishments in Bryan and College Station. Stacy De Leon will begin scheduling these events in June.

Parents of Teens and Tweens – “POTT” had casual meetings at the church while the Youth Group gathered on Sunday evenings. The group went out for pizza during the Youth Group Christmas Party and socializes at Youth Group activities, such as pool parties and cookouts. Kim Parr has volunteered to provide leadership to this group next year.

The 20s and 30s – Mo Bertrand organized a potluck lunch at the Harper’s house after church. When Pastor Brooke came on-board, she took over coordination of this group.

Families with Young Children – Brooke Torres and Joelle Hodson sent a survey to parents in late fall and reported their findings to the chair of the Nurture Committee. The survey indicated parents were interested in social events with their children and spiritual development at a time when child care was available to them. No action has been taken on this.

Care

Prayer Requests – Either Kristin Harper or Diane Simpson collect Prayer Requests after the 11:00 service. Those requests are added to any requests that are submitted via Facebook Comments and sent to the Pastors by Monday afternoon.

Meals – Sixteen church members and friends provide meals to church folks experiencing life challenges, such as a death in the family, illness, birth of baby, or health issues. The meals are coordinated using the free service “Meal Train.”

Welcome Letters – Pam Engler sends letters of welcome to visitors. Visitor cards are collected at the Offertory. On Monday, Administrative Assistant, Michael Rangel, sends names and addresses to Pam who send visitors a personal note of welcome.

Calls of Care – Doris Simpson calls and checks on members and friends as requested by the Nurture Chair.

Sympathy Cards and Memorials – When a friend or member experiences the death in their family, the Nurture Chair sends them a card of sympathy on behalf of the church. If the death is of an immediate family member, the card includes the offer to make a donation in the deceased person's name to one of five charities selected by the Church Council.

Youth Mission Trip Care Packages – To remind them of our support, the Nurture Committee sends our youth and adult volunteers off with bags of snacks and care items. These are usually given to the adults for distribution or provided in each vehicle.

Visits and Comfort – The Nurture Committee Chair offers assistance to individuals who are having a difficult time and tries to help meet their needs. This might include arranging transportation, providing meals, assisting with medical treatment, visiting at home or hospitals, helping with moves and making small home repairs. A variety of church members assist with this. In one case, where on-going assistance was indicated, a group of members met regularly to coordinate care.

Events

First Friday with Friends – About once a quarter, the Nurture and Fellowship Committee partner on a “meet-up” type event at Downtown Bryan's First Friday. Blackwater Draw has accommodated all of these events so far.

Hesed X – Dwight Baker coordinated registration and travel to the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary's Hesed Conference, “Where Faith and Justice Meet,” on March 4.

Other

Every week, the Nurture Chair submits slides to be shown prior to and after worship services. This began as a way to promote events and, by request, has grown to include regular reminders, requests, and updates.

Additionally, the Nurture Chair submits announcements for This Week @ Friends and for the Worship Guide (when space is available).

Spiritual Life Committee Annual Report 2022-2023

Overview

The Spiritual Life Committee assists and co-coordinates spiritual growth opportunities for individuals, small groups, families, communal settings, and with the Wider Church.

Committee Chair: Becky Burks

Committee Members: Jodie Robinson, Cathy Hansen, Linda Fitzwater, Laura Wimberley, Lanette Schulte, Jacque Halvorson, Joelle Hodson; Pastor Trent Williams

Individual Devotional Opportunities

- **Daily and Seasonal Devotionals** –
 - UCC Devotionals were purchased and provided for those who desired one for Advent 2022 and Lent 2023.
- **Labyrinth** - is located behind the church and is open daily to all. We honor this space as "holy space." The congregation was invited to walk the **Labyrinth for Holy Saturday 2023**, before Easter Sunday and educational information was provided.

Small Group Opportunities - Small group ministries offer deeper connections and relationships with each other in our faith community while exploring, nurturing, and growing in our spirituality together. Small groups give us an opportunity to nurture spiritual growth in a supportive and safe setting and to share the joys and concerns in our lives. Small groups form around monthly book studies, short term special interest studies, and contemplative prayer groups that broaden and deepen our relationship with God.

- **Linda Coats' Book Club** – has met on the **last Thursday evening of the month** every month from June 2022 through May 2023, with the exception of November and December, 2022. The theme for 2022 was “banned books” and the theme for 2023 is “spiritual memoirs”.
- **Lenten Weekly Meditation Group** – was held on Tuesday mornings during Lent at 7:30am and was led by Spiritual Life Committee members.
- **Social Justice Class**: This adult Sunday School class continues to meet weekly and explores how spiritual beliefs inform our daily life and our interactions with the world. Various speakers plus class-led volunteers prepare for the Sunday morning discussions.
- **Morning Manna Class**: This class meets weekly and explores scripture-based and lectionary studies and is led by Executive Pastor Trent Williams. The class is currently studying Hebrews.

Communal Opportunities

- **Theology on Tap**: Meets on the **2nd Thursday of the month** at 6pm at KinderHill Brew Lab, Bryan. It is called “Theology on Tap” because the informal discussions revolve around faith and spirituality, and the venue has an assortment of great beers on tap. You don’t need to be fond of beer to join in, nor do you have to be 21 or older. There are non-alcoholic beverages, minors are welcome, as are four-leggeds, and there is a wood-fired pizza food truck onsite.
- **Inquiry Class** - The Inquiry Class is designed to provide information to people that are interested in knowing more about Friends Congregational Church and the larger United Church of Christ. It is a place where they can both learn from current members and ask their questions in a welcoming environment. Inquiry classes are generally quarterly and were held on **8/21/22, 11/6/22, 2/12/23 and 5/7/23**. Participants are invited to share their individual faith journeys, to learn about and discuss the UCC Statement of Faith and explore the concept of Spiritual Locations. The Spiritual Life Committee provides the

meal, schedules at least two current members as panel members and facilitates the discussion.

- **SoulCare Ministry** – SoulCare is a new ministry and opportunity for service at Friends Congregational Church, that is also a partnership with friends from Saint Francis Episcopal Church, College Station. This new ministry will offer a time of singing, prayer and a short devotional to the residents of Fortress Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, on the **first Thursday of each month**. At a later time we hope to add an additional opportunity for friends to develop a one on one relationship with residents that do not have family around to visit them. We will also have the ability to help meet some of their needs by providing goodies for Bingo prizes or room decorations for their bulletin boards. Spiritual Life Committee members Linda Fitzwater and Cathy Hansen are coordinating.

Wider Church

- **The Journey (October):** The Journey is sponsored and hosted by the North Texas Journey Community at Camp Crucis just outside of Granbury, Texas. The Journey is a spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders. The Journey experience is a 72-hour short course in Christianity, comprised of talks and activities led by clergy and lay persons. **The Journey weekend was held September 29th through October 2nd, 2022, and a follow up gathering for Journey and other similar program (Cursillo, Walk to Emmaus, etc.) alumni on November 13th, 2022.**

Worship Committee Report May 2023

Worship Committee Chairs: Ryan Womack

Members: Andy Ambrus, Maggie Gartner, Anne Nichols, Wolfgang Verdegaal (Banners), Chris Abbott (Banners), Senior Pastor Dan De Leon (ex-officio), Associate Pastor Trent Williams (ex-officio), and Chris Hoffman (ex-officio).

The Worship Committee is responsible for coordinating with the ministerial staff in preparing all the details for regular and special worship services. The committee is tasked with making all the elements available for communion (including baking the bread); scheduling Greeters, Lay Leaders, and Communion Stewards for services; changing out liturgical cloths and banners appropriate for each season; keeping the altar candles ready for services; preparing the baptismal font and/or baptismal font for services; providing special decorations for Advent, Christmas, and Easter; making sure the sanctuary or other worship spaces are prepared and welcoming for each service, including placement of chairs; and making sure that Welcome, Pray, Give envelopes, Note Cards, pens, and hymnals are easily accessible for our church family and guests. They also assist with arrangements for funerals, vigils, ordinations, and other special services.

Attendance records for 2022 - 2023:

Average attendances:

Sunday, 9:00 am service - 39 (In person 6/5/22 - 5/7/23) Sunday, 11:00 am service - 115 (In person 6/5/22 - 5/7/23)

Christmas Cantata - 144

Longest Night - 31

Christmas Eve - 181

Ash Wednesday (morning) - 20

Ash Wednesday (evening) - 65

Maundy Thursday - 25

Palm Sunday (9:00) - 49

Palm Sunday (11:00) - 117

Good Friday - 145

Easter (9:00) - 101

Easter (11:00) - 208

We are always looking for members of our church family who are interested in helping to make the worship experience even more welcoming and meaningful, and are willing to make the commitment to help make that possible.

Special thanks go to the coordinators of specific areas: Anne Nichols, Andy Ambrus, and Maggie Gartner for their continued help with - Taking care of our banners' needs, candles, baptisms, new members, special Sundays, baking our communion bread, and for general help anytime I needed help! Also special thanks to Wolfgang Verdegaal, and Chris Abbott for hanging our upper banners through the year.

Special thanks goes to those that helped with Hanging of the Greens: Ruth DeLeon, Dan DeLeon, Linda Fitzwater, Mary Johnson, Andy Ambrus, Anne Nichols, Brent Paterson, Maggie Gartner, Jan Paterson, Grace Jackson, Chris Hoffman (playing of Christmas Carols), Wolfgang (with Noah and George) Verdegall, Robin Miller, and Ken Fogle.

Finally, for those that helped take down the Greens: Dan DeLeon, Katy Stewart, Dwight Baker, Susan Fontaine, Jacque Halverson, Jody Robinson, Steve Robinson, Anne Wehrly, Andy Ambrus, and Anne Nichols.

2022-23 Christian Education Annual Report

Committee Members: Robin Miller, Tami Dudo, Anne Wehrly, Mary Howell, Brooke Dooley, Drew Bowen, Amanda Bowen, Jennifer Patrick, Margaret Foster, Doris Machinski

The Christian Education Committee plans and provides Sunday School for our children and youth, community service projects, and youth group activities. This year we provided weekly Sunday School and youth group activities, along with providing the following annual events:

- Back to school fellowship breakfast
- Christmas Pageant
- Angel Tree Ornaments
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Graduate Recognition
- Youth-led Worship Service
- Confirmation Class: Seven confirmands began their journey last spring, leading to a deeper understanding of their faith and their relationships with Christ, the church, and the greater community. Confirmation Sunday was held on October 16, 2022.
- Youth Mission Trip: Our youth missionaries and sponsors traveled to Albuquerque in July, 2022, where they worked with Be the Neighbor and learned about issues affecting immigrants and indigenous communities, community organizing, and the Puebla Cultural Center. They are currently preparing for the Race and Reconciliation Mission Trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

After a long hiatus, Vacation Bible School returns June 12-16, using the new *Who Do You Say I Am?* curriculum. These detective-themed lessons investigate five of Christ's "I am" statements from the Gospel of John.

Deputy Moderator of Trustees Report 2022-2023

Fran B. Duane, Deputy Moderator of Trustees

Personnel

Wayne Hamman

Recruitment

Conducted and participated in sourcing candidates for Pianist, Childcare Worker and AV Technician. Established a new listing/accounts for on-line job boards to be utilized in future searches. AV Tech. and Childcare Worker have been filled. Recruitment for Pianist is ongoing.

Benefits

Reviewed FLSA and ACA rules to determine benefits eligibility for Friends Church part time employees.

Position Descriptions/Pastoral Agreements

Reviewed, updated, and prepared job descriptions for pianist, childcare worker and lead child care worker.

Reviewed Associate Pastoral Call Agreement, Executive Pastoral Agreement and Senior Pastoral Agreement and presented recommendations.

Ongoing HR Functions

- Review/update the Human Resources Handbook (formally “Personnel Handbook”)
- Prepare policy and procedures for childcare functions
- Assist in review and development of effective staff performance appraisal program.

Property

Susan Fontaine

It has been a busy year for Property. Luckily, our church has a great team of people that volunteer their skills to help. I very much have appreciated the help and support of everyone. We have 6 teams of people that take turns cleaning our fountain and 3 teams of people that take turns doing laundry. In addition to those teams, I regularly call on the maintenance and construction skills of Lance Parr, Bill Harper, Bruce Williams, Steve Robinson and many others. I'm going to summarize the year in categories.

Siding and Window Replacement Project

In June 2022, the two sides of the “horseshoe” area behind the altar wall and the back wall behind the nursery were completed. This involved the complete replacement of 6 windows. In

June of this year (2023), the final part of this project will be completed which includes the high altar wall along with the top 2 high small walls under the sanctuary roof. This is the most expensive portion due to the extreme heights along with the increase in construction material cost. The down payment for this has already been paid with the remainder to be paid in July after work is completed. The Hardie Plank siding is much more durable than the old siding. And it, along with the new windows are more energy efficient.

Plumbing

During the year, we had a broken water main out near Southwood that had to be dug up and repaired. The same area had another leak in the vicinity but after that work, it appears that it was finally repaired. We have had a few minor issues with toilets.

Sanctuary Light Fixtures

The light fixtures do not have replaceable bulbs so when they go out, the entire fixture needs to be replaced. The fixtures over the pulpit and altar started going out in late 2022. These lights are the ones that are left on 24/7. New fixtures were ordered from Dealer's Electric by our contractor, Julio. We have one fixture currently stored in the metal shed that has a bit of life left on it in case we have another one goes out. They cost around \$600 per fixture so that replacement cost needs to be considered in the future. The lights that were replaced were used about 4 times as much as the other lights so we are potentially a few years away from having to replace other fixtures. It is likely that most of the others would be going out within a short time frame of the other ones.

HVAC

We had the blower go out on the kitchen side unit this year. This is the oldest unit we have because the other two units were replaced after the hailstorm. This cost \$3655 to repair/replace. We also had a drain pan clog up.

New Refrigerator

Our old refrigerator was beyond repair, so it was replaced this year.

Freezing Weather

Our temperature monitoring sensors sent out alerts properly when temperatures inside the church dropped to extremely low levels this winter. Lance Parr and Bill Harper were able to build a temporary block for the vent window into the attic space above the kitchen to shield the pipes from the freezing wind. We are contracting to build a permanent vent shutter that can be placed over that vent area each winter. We also had the fountain freeze this year and it was during Christmas. The frozen water was very attractive to the children but did present a safety concern so we would plan to drain the fountain if possible before severe freezes in the future.

Back Door Replacement

We were finally able to find a contractor that could obtain a door that fit our needs so the back door that had rotted has been replaced. We should receive a small amount of depreciation from our insurance company because the door was heavily damaged in the freeze claim from Feb 2021. I have submitted it for the claim.

Parking Lot Drainage

With the recent heavy rains, we noticed that the parking lot drainage backup was worse than in the past. Steve Robinson contacted the city who came out to meet with him. They believe that the recent work done by TXDOT and the heavy equipment parked adjacent to our property contributed to our drainage issue. Steve then reported it to TXDOT and they have advised that they would research the problem and get back to us.

Building Rentals

We have had an increasing number of requests to use our buildings. We have a number of non-profit groups that hold their monthly meetings at our church. We have also had weddings, funerals, memorial services, and parties.

Stewardship

David Manuel

In January of 2023 we began working with GSB and our consultant Nathan Swenson-Reinhold. Ministry goals were established, and the consultant organization is assisting in the overall structure and creation of the campaign. Commitment Sunday is scheduled and will hopefully increase our monthly giving to enable progress toward the stated goals.

Financial Secretary's Report

Justin Dudo

The Financial Secretary's primary duties are to:

- Collect, categorize, and prepare detailed data on all income to the church weekly from donations, etc. through the completion of a Cash and Checks spreadsheet form.
- Prepare bank deposit, make the deposit.
- Communicate donation information to the Treasurer weekly based on the Cash and Checks spreadsheet form.
- Enter weekly donations and other income into the online financial management system
- Deposit donations made via Venmo monthly.
- Report Venmo donations to the Treasurer monthly
- Prepare the detailed giving report for the Treasurer monthly.
- Respond to questions and requests by the Treasurer and other individuals about the above
- Participate as a member of the Finance Committee by attending meetings, etc.
- Train, as needed, others in performing the duties of the Financial Secretary
- Assist, as needed, in preparing annual giving reports and semi-annual pledge reports for individual congregation members.

It is the goal of the current financial secretary to work with Pastor Trent to **establish a merchant account.**

Youth Representative
Mac De Leon

We began our year with the conclusion of our RIP Medical Debt Campaign which raised \$51,100 to obliterate \$11.8 million in medical debt. We then had our summer mission trip in July in Albuquerque, New Mexico where we learned about the history of the relationship with Native Americans in New Mexico, the current state of poverty in the city, and how to best help those in need, both in that one week of service and when we head back to BCS.

Following the mission trip, we reflected on the joys and challenges of the trip and discussed new fundraising campaign ideas for the future. While micro lending seemed to be the most favored choice, there hasn't been much development on it since the fall. We also had our youth led worship service in August to express to the congregation what we had reflected on.

In the fall, we had the annual Crop Hunger Walk and a bake sale fundraiser for the mission trip. We had our annual Christmas Pageant which was chaotic yet enjoyable as always. In the spring, the youth group participated in 30 Hour Famine as a way of learning about the effects of hunger both through informational videos and our own fasting.

We had a meeting to explore fundraising options for this year's mission trip to Tulsa where we will learn about the Tulsa Race Massacre and other events that have led to continued segregation, homelessness, and poverty.

Again, this month we focused on mental health awareness and ended the month with our graduate recognition service and youth led trivia fundraiser.

Sunday School is no longer happening for the summer, and I feel that it is important to note that attendance has been down for high school Sunday School due to it having to take place at 1541.

While I understand that there is not enough space to accommodate all Sunday School classes in the church space, I felt that it was an important issue to bring up in case there is a possible way to have high school Sunday School take place at the church when it starts back up in the 2023 school year.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Chair: Jacque Halverson (Congregational Representative)

Committee Members: Christine Gravelle (Congregational Representative), Kathy de Figueiredo, Holly Scott, Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon (ex officio)

Friends Church is blessed with our members who are willing to serve and equally blessed with ones who were not able to make the commitment this year. As we move into the next phase of our church life, we're grateful for our church leaders.

TWO YEAR TERMS:

Moderator	Jackie Womack
Vice Moderator	
Deputy Moderator of Programs	Kathy Miller
Church Council Secretary	Sue Ambrus
Congregational Representative (odd year)	Jack Burley
Financial Secretary	Alex Cannon
Justice & Mission Chair	Grace Jackson
Property	Steve Robinson
Christian Education	
Fellowship Chair	Jan Paterson
Spiritual Life Ministry	Becky Burks
Senior Pastoral Relations	Tim Scott
Executive Pastoral Relations	Susan Miculka
Associate Pastoral Relations	Jenn Bacak

ONE YEAR TERMS:

Youth Representative Trustees	
Youth Representative Programs	

The positions to be filled next year by the outgoing Congregational Representative and Nominating Committee are Deputy Moderator of Trustees, Council Treasurer, Congregational Representative, Diversity & Inclusion Representative, Stewardship Chair, Human Resources Chair, Outreach and Evangelism Chair, Nurture Chair, Worship Chair, Senior Pastoral Relations, Executive Pastoral Relations, Associate Pastoral Relations.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jacque Halverson, on behalf of the Odd Year Nominating Committee
(Christine Gravelle, Kathy de Figueiredo, Holly Scott, and Pastor Dan De Leon)