

**Gainesville First United Methodist Church**  
**Church Council Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

**Laity in Attendance:** Mark Alexander, David Barnett, Kimberly Barnett, Amy Britt, Amanda Bruner, Robert Bruner, Pam Cameron, Doug Carter, Susan Daniell, Headen Embry, Leslie Frierson, Lee Highsmith, Anna Pardue, Nancy Story, Ron Stowe, Frank Waggoner, Mary Wall, Robbie Westbrooks, Laura Williams, Susan Wright

**Clergy and Staff in Attendance:** Michelle Alexander, Carolyn Clifton, Ginnie Highsmith, Joshua Hudson, Mark Klein, John LaForge, Mary Lina Pardue, Jamey Prickett, Brad Shumake, Sandy Skinner

**Guests in Attendance:** Jeff Chandler, Nathan Crumley, Beth Curry, David Dye, Jake Gailey, Barb Mistarz, Tracy Vardeman, Janet Walden

### **WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS/RECOGNITIONS**

Church Council Chair, Susan Daniell, welcomed all to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting and their faithful attendance throughout 2023. New 2024 Church Council members attending the meeting as guests were introduced: Nathan Crumley, Beth Curry, David Dye, Jake Gailey, Anna Pardue, Tracy Vardeman, and Janet Walden. Members rotating off Church Council were recognized and thanked for their service: David Barnett, Kimberly Barnett, Pam Cameron, Doug Carter, Heather Chandler, Tom Cole, Cathy Dyches, Nat Hancock, Brad Pierce, Nancy Story, and Susan Wright.

### **Opening Prayer**

Rev. Carolyn Clifton offered the opening prayer.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Chair Daniell asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 26, 2023 meeting. **Motion:** Doug Carter moved to approve the minutes. Robert Bruner seconded. All in favor, none opposed. **Motion carried.**

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS**

#### **Finance Committee Report and 2024 Budget Approval**

David Barnett recognized and thanked members of the Finance Committee, as well as staff members Jessica McKee and Mark Klein, for their commitment and efforts in 2023. He expressed appreciation for having the opportunity to lead the Finance Committee the past three years. The financial report was distributed as a part of the meeting packet. At the end of November, the budget reflected a \$393,000 deficit. It is anticipated that end-of-year giving will reduce that deficit some, though Chair Barnett indicated the budget may end the year at a deficit. He did emphasize that GFUMC remains in a very strong cash position with over \$1,000,000 in the various reserve accounts.

**Motion:** Leslie Frierson moved to approve the Finance Committee report. Robbie Westbrooks seconded. All in favor, none opposed. **Motion carried.**

Chair Barnett distributed the proposed budget for 2024, gave a brief explanation of the budget, and invited questions and comments. The \$2,964,000 budget is \$176,000 less than the 2023 budget (5.6% less). It was noted that the budget reductions do not impact any ministries, programs, and outreach of the church. Most reductions are from the Trustees budget line.

**Motion:** Doug Carter motioned to approve the 2024 Budget. Susan Wright seconded. All in favor, none opposed. **Motion carried.**

**Trustees** - There was no report from the Trustees.

**Staff Parish Relations Committee Report** - There was no report from the SPRC.

### **Columbarium and Memorial Garden Committee**

Jeff Chandler presented the report for Chair Nat Hancock. Jeff recognized Nat Hancock for the excellent leadership he has provided to the committee. The Columbarium project is complete. The contract with Deep Roots for maintenance of the Memorial Garden was recently renewed. The committee is pleased with the work of Deep Roots and is pleased to retain its services for the coming year.

**Memorial Fund Committee** - There was no report from the Memorial Fund Committee.

**Endowment Trust Fund Committee** - There was no report from the Endowment Trust Fund Committee.

### **Scouting Ministry**

Robert Bruner reported that Troop 16 Scouts have been involved with many volunteer projects around the church. Membership in the troop continues to increase, with great enthusiasm and participation among troop members.

### **MINISTRY CELEBRATION – CARING MINISTRIES**

Rev. Carolyn Clifton provided a report on the extensive and impactful Caring Ministries program. The multifaceted ministry includes:

**Worship and Community Ministry** – Jim Reavis leads this ministry which serves 13 independent and assisted living locations monthly. In 2023 38 lay volunteers and 10 staff members participated in presenting worship (music, devotional, communion). Locations include: The Gardens Assisted Living, The Gardens Independent Living, Lanier Village Willowbrook Court, Lanier Village Oakbridge, 2nd floor, Lanier Village Oakbridge, 3rd floor, The Phoenix, Manor Lake, The Lakes, The Oaks, Smokey Springs, Ashton, Bell Minor, and New Horizon - Lanier Park.

**Bereavement Ministry** – Thus far in 2023 the Bereavement Ministry has hosted 17 receptions. The group included about 15 volunteers, with many others providing food for the receptions.

**Grief Support Group** – Doug and BJ Jensen lead a grief support group meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays of each month. The program is open to the community.

**Caregiver Support Group** - A support group for those caring for a spouse or parent(s), often with dementia, is facilitated by two Brenau University graduate students. The group meets weekly and is open to the community.

**Stephen Ministry** – Currently there are five Stephen Leaders, 10 active Stephen Ministers, and eight assignments.

**Quilt Ministry** – There are about five active participants who made 25-30 quilts in 2023. This year the group has provided 19 baptism quilts. Ten prayer quilts were given to the Chapin at NEGMC, about five quilts were provided to church members, and quilts were provided for families participating in the Family Promise program.

**Prayer Shawl Ministry** – In 2023 over 131 articles were stitched by group members. Items include shawls, lap throws, hats (winter, chemo, baby), scarves, baby blankets, and angel wraps. The items were distributed to GFUC members, patients at NEGMC, in Honduras, and other outreach ministries.

**Homebound Touchpoints**– Those participating in this ministry send Forget Me Not cards to homebound members monthly. Christmas and Easter cards and small gifts are also delivered to homebound members.

**The Longest Night Service** – This annual service, during Advent, provides care and comfort for those dealing with grief, experiencing distress, and/or seeking a calm, comforting respite during the busy holiday season. The upcoming service is on December 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:00 pm.

**Labyrinth (in Lent 2024)** – There will be a Labyrinth at GFUMC throughout the season of Lent. Rev. Clifton will be leading weekly classes during Lent for those interested in enhancing their prayer lives and Lent practices. Detailed information will be available on the GFUMC website. Rev. Clifton expressed appreciation to the Centering Prayer group for their help with the Labyrinth project.

## **MINISTRIES AND MISSIONS REPORTS**

### **Adult Discipleship**

Rev. Sandy Skinner celebrated the success of the Midweek Meals. Participation was good in the fall and meals will continue in 2024 on Wednesday evenings. The recent “Welded” event for men was a huge success. Over 130 men enjoyed a wonderful low country boil and oyster roast meal and shared meaningful worship together. The organizing group is already planning for the 2024 event. Registration will soon open for a broad array of Discipleship opportunities beginning in January 2024 and continuing through the spring season.

### **Outreach and Hospitality Report**

Rev. Joshua Hudson reported that the new Navigators program is doing great work. There is a Hospitality Training planned for January 7<sup>th</sup>. The lunch program is for new and continuing ushers, greeters, coffee hosts, and Navigators.

Rev. Hudson also reported that the Outreach Committee’s focus in 2024 is Mental Health. Sermons and – We are focusing on mental health in 2024. On March 10<sup>th</sup> Rev. Ron Greer, an experienced pastoral counselor, will present a program on GFUMC on the topic “Staying Connected When the Topic is Divisive.” The program is open to the community. Detailed information will be available in early-2024. There will also be a “Sources of Strength” program led by David Smith. This program focuses on the concept of “belonging,” a critical component of good mental health.

### **Worship Arts**

John Laforge reported that the recent celebration of Keith Jeffcoat’s 30 years at GFUMC, and 50 years as a Church Musician, was a wonderful, well-attended celebration. John recognized Keith, Michelle Alexander, and Lisa Stover for their incredible efforts with all the Worship Arts programs throughout 2023. The 2023 concert series was attended by more than 1500 people. The annual Christmas Concert is December 17<sup>th</sup>. Concerts planned in early-2024 include the Atlanta Vocal Program, with a men’s Barbershop choir, and the Easter portion of Handel’s Messiah on Palm Sunday. The Chancel Choir welcomed 10 new members this year.

Michelle Alexander represents GFUMC on the community King Day Planning Committee. She invited all to participate in the upcoming King Day march and program at the Butler Center on January 15<sup>th</sup>.

## Children’s Ministry and Pre-School

MaryLina Pardue celebrated the hugely successful “Trunk or Treat” event in October with an estimated 1500 participants. MaryLina thanked the many volunteers making this community outreach program possible. “Breakfast with Santa,” held last Saturday, was a fun and festive event with over 450 participants (the event quickly filled with a waiting list). Breakfast, Santa, games, crafts, and other fun events were enjoyed. Over 60 children participated in the Children’s Ministry Christmas program, “Red Letter Christmas.” with Santa with 450 kids. Sunday we had the children’s Christmas program. The Pre-School children have enjoyed the Christmas season. Students and their teachers are looking forward to their upcoming Christmas program.

## Student and Young Adult Ministries

Ginnie Highsmith reported that students enjoyed a fun and meaningful fall with many activities, including a wonderful Friendsgiving Dinner, and many Christmas activities. Jump Start meets every Tuesday morning at Longstreet Café at 7:00 a.m. Tim Bunch at Longstreet provides free breakfast to youth participating in the weekly program. Each week 45-60 students gather for a message, prayers, fellowship, and breakfast. Many adults support the program by transporting students to their schools throughout Hall County each Tuesday morning. Looking ahead to 2024, in addition to regularly scheduled weekly activities, Confirmation Class will begin in February, and a Student Ministries Retreat is planned for March.

## PASTORAL UPDATES AND VISION CASTING

Rev. Jamey Prickett expressed gratitude to Tim Bunch at Longstreet Café for his weekly hospitality. GFUMC Night at Longstreet is Monday, March 11<sup>th</sup> starting at 5:30 p.m. Jamey encouraged all to participate, that evening we will have the opportunity to express appreciation to Tim for the huge role he plays in students’ lives.

Rev. Prickett commended the amazing clergy and staff at GFUMC and expressed appreciation for all they do, much that we do not see or know about, to further Build Bridges to Jesus.

In 2024 our churchwide emphasis will be on evangelism. Jamey emphasized the importance of **being with people**. We have the opportunity to be with and be present with people - this is so needed! He reminded the group of the meaning of Emmanuel – God **with** us and encouraged all to be intentional with our efforts to be with others now and throughout 2024. At GFUMC we will pursue a culture where we **intentionally invite people to encounter Jesus**, just as Andrew, the Disciple, did.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Rev. Prickett closed the meeting with prayer.

## ADJOURNMENT

Daniell thanked all for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned.

### 2024 Church Council Meeting Dates at 7:00 p.m.

February 13, 2024  
August 13, 2024

April 9, 2024  
October 8, 2024

June 25, 2024  
December 10, 2024

Please put these dates on your calendar.  
Should changes become necessary, notification will be sent ASAP.