

# Holy Comforter Episcopal Church

## Annual Report 2023



## Rector's Annual Report 2023

2023 was an important year for Holy Comforter as we celebrated our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary together. As part of that celebration, we received numerous testimonies of how God has been at work over the years in and through the ministry of this parish. Unsurprisingly, many referred to the place as their spiritual “home,” and to the people as their “family.” Many spoke of the “love,” “acceptance,” “compassion,” and “unity” they have found here. As one person put it, “surely the presence of the Lord is in this place!”

All of those wonderful qualities drew me to Holy Comforter when I accepted the call to serve as your new Rector in February. It has been a whirlwind of a first year since then, and I continue to rejoice that God brought me here.

Much of our success over this past year is due to the stellar work of our dedicated staff. **Mtr. Beth Pessah** continues to go above and beyond the call of duty in her role as Associate Rector and I am extremely grateful for her partnership in ministry. As will be evident later in the report, the Church-school relationship is stronger than ever in large part because of her ministry as Chaplain. Through her many chapel services, teaching, special events, and pastoral care, we are making an enormous difference in the lives of these young students.

Two others have made vital contributions as members of our clergy team: **Fr. Jim May** and **Fr. Michael Henderson**, retired priests who now serve as our Pastoral Assistants. Fr. Jim is our Chaplain for Community Care, ministering to those in local independent and assisted living communities like Westminster, The Grove, Allegro, and others. Fr. Michael, meanwhile, offers services of Holy Communion and pastoral care to residents of The Grove. Between the two of them, we are effectively meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of these older parishioners.

Meanwhile, God greatly blessed our pastoral care team with the addition of **Dr. Melanie Salsgiver**. Melanie's years of experience in nursing have prepared her well for ministry, especially to those with physical needs: the sick, the hospitalized, and those in recovery. Melanie has transformed our whole care program by reorganizing the pastoral team and training up a fantastic new group of lay leaders for Stephen Ministry. In addition, she has overseen our “Walking the Mourner's Path” grief ministry program. Thanks be to God, Melanie will continue in these roles at Holy Comforter as prepares for ordination to the priesthood.

One of our highest priorities this year has been the development of our ministries for youth and children. **Julianne Chester** has been a driving force behind that initiative. Julianne's commitment to excellence, her creativity, and her years of experience make her an invaluable member of our staff. Despite working with a truncated budget this past year, Julianne organized and led our highly successful Vacation Bible School, oversees our weekly Sunday school, and leads all of our other special youth and children's events. With her help, we have also now begun a Youth Plan Commission that is making exciting new plans for the future.

The music each Sunday is an essential part of our worship, and **John-Mark Schacht** is the mastermind behind it all. What sets him apart is his ability to choose the right songs each week, with deeply meaningful lyrics, always appropriate to the season, and perfectly in line with the readings. His musical sensibilities and caring leadership of the choir have been outstanding. We are also blessed to have such a committed and capable organist in **Patty Herrington**. When you see her play each week, you are seeing about 10% of everything she does for the music team. Both John-Mark and Patty inspire me to worship “in spirit and in truth.”

If you've enjoyed watching any of our services and events online, then you can thank **Fred Chester** for making that possible. As our audio-visual wizard, Fred also oversees the sound booth for all our Sunday services, concerts, and special events. He's the reason everything sounds so good!

Another recent addition to the staff was our new Office Manager, **Kathleen Mellino**. In Kathleen, we have found a person whose whole attitude and personality shout out: “you are welcome to Holy Comforter, how can I help you?” She has been busy learning the ropes of all our office policies and procedures and is quickly gaining in confidence. With a calendar full of activities in 2024, Kathleen will play a vital administrative role.

One of the unsung heroes of our office staff is our Administrative Assistant, **Judi Kendrick**. Judi prepares all of our service bulletins and handles much of our social media and communications work, including our E-Dove and Dove magazines. In addition, Judi handled our transition to a new online church directory and took on several special projects. Without her dedication and selfless service behind the scenes, we would never be able to offer what we do.

The same is true of **Gina Resavage**, our Finance Manager. It is hard to imagine someone more capable, dependable, and professional at her job, or more responsive to our needs. As we do things like handle payroll, keep track of expenses, and create our annual budget, she has been essential.

**Alpha Holmes** continues to serve as our sexton, keeping our facilities clean and well-maintained. With all of the services and events we have—especially with the school kids—our buildings go through a lot of wear and tear. Alpha does a great job of making sure that things are neat and tidy. When he injured himself recently and was unable to be at work, we became all the more aware of how much we depend on him! Special mention should also be made of **Joe Watts**, who has given generously of his time to assist Alpha on many maintenance projects.

In addition to these wonderful staff members, we have been blessed with one of the strongest Vestry teams we have ever had. **Judy Shipman** has been invaluable to me as our Senior Warden. I needed someone like her—a long-term member of the parish—to help orient me as the new Rector, give wise advice, and uphold me in ministry. Under her leadership, the Vestry has worked remarkably smoothly this year. Our Junior Warden, **Chris Jester**, took on the giant task of overseeing our Buildings and Grounds Committee before he was unfortunately sidelined by his wife Cynthia’s health concerns. Nevertheless, his love for and dedication to the church are an inspiration. The rest of the Vestry team—**Sterling Luce**, **Jackie Watts**, **Susan Robinson**, **Jenna Brown**, and **Robert Efthim**—have all made major contributions, guided us faithfully in all the decisions they’ve made, and been a joy to work with. In addition, **Andy Granger** and **Patricia Trom** have supported the Vestry’s work as our Treasurer and Clerk, respectively. Their monthly reports have ensured that everything is in good order and operating smoothly.

I cannot begin to name all of the many volunteers who have helped to make this year such a success. As you look through the rest of this Annual Report, you will notice that almost all of our ministries were led by lay volunteers, often backed up by a whole team of other volunteers. When it comes to church services and events, special mention should be made of **Dawn Lynch**, head of the Altar Guild; **Rosetta Efthim**, Lectors and Servers Coordinator; **Carolyn DiSalvo**, leader of the Flower Guild; **Dr. Paul Robinson**, Coordinator of Ushers and Greeters; **Nancy Rubin**, head of the Hospitality Committee; **Tom Gray**, leader of the Men’s Cooking Crew; **Julianne Chester**, Supper Club Coordinator; **Robbie Brunger**, head of the Book Club; **Judy Shipman**, head of Daughters of the King; **Bill Reineking**, leader of Cursillo; **Jan Calvin**, head of the Prayer Angels; **Anne Womack**, our Office Volunteers Coordinator; **Sandra Cartwright**, overseeing the Banner Committee; **Sandi Jacobsen**, head of the Card Ministry; and **Randy Desilet**, chair of the Safety and Security Committee. For social outreach, we give special thanks for **Fred Kinch**, head of our Food Pantry; **Susan Robinson**, overseeing our Creation Care Committee, the Garden Guild, and the Capital Area Justice Committee; **Nancy Daniels**, our liaison with Grace Mission; and **Julie Sullivan**, our leader for missions to Cuba. I give thanks to God, and to you, for all you’ve done.

The Lord has given us big plans as we now move forward in 2024. As I shared during our Anniversary festivities, we will be working to attract younger generations to join our congregation.

Currently, our membership consists predominantly of people over the age of 55. For the sustainability and vitality of our parish, it's a strategic imperative for us to invest more in outreach to families, especially by strengthening our youth and children's ministries.

In addition, we will be investing even more in pastoral care for the elderly members of our congregation. Many of them are now grappling with both physical and spiritual issues. In light of this, we want to provide them with the very best "holy comfort" we can.

Thank you for joining with us as we seek to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ and to reach out to others in His name. We are grateful to be your spiritual home and family!

Father Allen Hill

## **Associate Rector and School Chaplain Annual Report for 2023**

### **From Running on Empty to Running with Perseverance**

It is hard to believe that when the 2023 year began I was still holding down the fort as both Associate and Rector. We celebrated the New Year, the Chalking (Blessing) of the brand New Doors, Candlemas (blessing of candles) and Deacon Jeanie's retirement in the first two months of the year. Father Allen began just in time for Lent. I took a deep breath and then imposed ashes at five Ash Wednesday services (four for the school students and teachers). I continued to maintain my regular schedule as Associate Rector and Chaplain for HCES.

I finished out a Reading Together through the book of Acts program with parishioners, parents and teachers. There were 48 participants in the program. I appreciate these Reading Together studies because they help me stay focused on reading through a complete book of the bible within the school year. I am currently (2023-2024 school year) leading another Reading Together study through the Gospel of John with 21 participants.

We arranged a mailing to all of the School families (400+) with a Lenten theme that incorporated "Seeing and Looking for Jesus". The mailing included a devotional with 3D glasses and special 3D pictures. I give special thanks to the wonderful ladies from Westminster Oaks who helped collate the mailing once again and Julianne Chester who worked with me to organize the mailing and take it to the Bulk Mail depot.

During the 2022-2023 school year, I officiated at Lower School Chapels for Prek3 through grade five three times a week and Middle School Chapels once every six days. I taught grade four religion (the Old Testament), grade five religion (the New Testament), Grade six religion (the Parables of Jesus) and grade seven religion (the Acts and the Epistles of Paul). I offered daily email prayers for faculty and staff, hosted a praying parents group once a month (January through May) and had many pastoral conversations with faculty, staff and parents.

In March we joined together as a group to do a Lenten Service Project; cleaning up the Hickory Hill Cemetery. Thank you to all who joined in and made light work of the task before us. It was a pleasure to meet Dr. Sloan face to face after months of meeting online and talking about how we as a Church could help. Thank you to Susan Robinson who helped to coordinate the effort.

Along with Seasonal Eucharists (Easter, Baccalaureate, End of School) I had the pleasure of blessing the Cross-Country Course (Lawson's course) and officiating at the Grade 8 Camp Weed retreat.

The summer provided time to go and visit with my Mother in Ontario and do some other vacation type activities while preparing for a return to school in August.

August provided a reopening of my schedule with a more concentrated focus on my duties as Associate Rector and Chaplain. We began with Faculty and Staff Eucharist and the delightful treat bags that we provide with special thanks to Julianne Chester, Joan and Jim Bob Maddox, John and Joy Green and a host of volunteers from the Church and School committee. We provided Backpack tags for every student which were blessed at the All School Eucharist.

With the aim of creating time and space for parishioners and teachers to increase their mental and physical health, I invited KC Knudsen, a yoga instructor and the Media Center Specialist at HCES to lead us in Chair Yoga on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Thank you to all of you who have supported KC in this ministry here at Holy Comforter. I have found it personally to be a helpful addition to my schedule.

I have added Wednesday lunch duty with grade three to my schedule this year and have resumed leading Tuesday Morning Prayer in person and online. In August, I had the joy of leading a confirmation class for Ian, Dakota, Quint and Stella.

The Fall Festival was a hit as always and the Church and School Committee invited the students to create banners to illustrate the theme of "Running the race with perseverance". John and Joy Green continue to extend hospitality on Friday mornings by offering coffee and welcome for Friday morning chapels. The Church and School Committee sent out an Advent mailing to the families at HCES including an Advent devotional with a Nativity backdrop and stickers. With the permission of the Bishop of Arkansas, I adapted his idea of Lego Advent; offering daily prayers through Lego building. I also provided Advent devotionals to every teacher and staff member at HCES during the Advent season. We finished off the 2023 school year with Christmas Eucharist. Our own Holy Comforter Church families were invited to join in participating in the 4:30 pm Christmas Eve service. We had children and youth involved in every part of the service: readers, acolytes, candle lighting, ushers, and even putting the baby Jesus in the creche. I am so thankful for each young person who offered themselves in service for Christmas Eve. Their involvement made that Christmas Eve service all the more special for me. Thank you to Sydney, Quint, John, Stella, Ian, Max, and Charlotte. And I extend a special thank you to Julianne and Fred who once again created and produced the children's video portion of the service which also included Michael, Paisleigh, Mallory, James, Brayden and Dakota. Please remember that children are not the future of the church, they are already the church! We need to continue to make space for young people and their families to be welcomed and loved here at Holy Comforter. When our own children and youth know that they belong and have a place here then we will begin to draw others as well. Let's keep the door to opportunity and service open so that we might learn and grow from these young people as they learn and grow with us.

Thank you for your continued support through prayer, encouragement and hands on help. I appreciate the tremendous opportunity that it is to be surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. And so I leave you with the National Association of Episcopal Schools theme for this year, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Hebrews 12:1-2. Amen.

Mother Beth Pessah

## WORSHIP MINISTRIES

**Readers and Acolytes** - Readers, servers, chalicers and acolytes were trained and each service has well-trained worship leaders. We are blessed to have many answering God's call to service.

**The Altar Guild** – The altar guild is composed of teams of parishioners who have chosen to serve God by preparing the altar for the Eucharist. The teams follow a rotating schedule. The team serves from Saturday to Friday and is responsible for any services that occur during the week. Our responsibilities include setting the altar, cleaning up afterward, maintaining the linens, and polishing the brass and silver. Altar Guild members also ensure the sacristy is kept stocked with wine, wafers, gleam lights, candles and oil.

In addition to the regular church services, we also prepared for school Eucharists several times a year, as well as weddings, funerals, and more formal services such as those during Holy Week and Christmas.

The Altar Guild welcomes new members, both men and women, who can help with the 8:00 or 10:30 service.

Dawn Lynch

**Choir & Music** - Choir and Music led by John-Mark Schacht provided hymns and songs for Sunday morning and other Service programming throughout the year. In partnership with Ftr Allen, the choir enjoyed the opportunity to explore new service music and other worshipful selections such as The Great Litany and Advent's Festival of Lessons and Carols. The choir remains blessed by a talented array of instrumentalists who lend rich texture to weekly programming. The choir strives to offer an array of musical styles which blend traditional melodies and forms along with Christian contemporary favorites.

John-Mark Schacht

**Flower Guild** - The flower guild's mission is to glorify God's house at Holy Comforter with fresh flowers and greenery created by His own handiwork. Guild members design a beautiful flower arrangement for behind the altar every Sunday morning except during the Lenten season. Church members are encouraged to sign up to sponsor the flower arrangement on one or more Sundays during the year to celebrate a special blessing, an important date, or the life of a dear departed loved one. To help defer the cost of the flowers, the church requests a \$50 donation from the sponsoring family. The family's dedication will then appear in that week's E-Dove and Sunday bulletin so that the whole church family can share in the special observance.

Parishioners may also wish to sponsor the poinsettias that decorate the church at Christmas and the lilies that are displayed at Eastertide. Prior to the start of the Advent season, we use fresh greenery to design the lovely "Advent wreath" on a beautiful brass stand.

We could really use new members! God delights when His family joyfully serves Him in ministry, and maybe the flower guild is that ministry for you. If you love flowers and enjoy working with them, please consider this your personal invitation. If you feel inadequate or intimidated, please know that experience is not required! You can shadow a more experienced member until you feel comfortable. God blesses our efforts, imperfect though they may be.

Carolyn DiSalvo

## OUTREACH

**Community Care** - Fr. Jim May has been appointed "Chaplain for Community Care" with special responsibility for providing pastoral care ministry to those living in local independent and assisting living communities such as Westminster, The Grove, Allegro, and others. In addition to weekly pastoral visits and phone calls to those communities, Fr. Jim offers Holy Communion at Westminster every Wednesday. Over 500 people have attended that service over this past year, including several Holy Comforter communicants who participate regularly. In addition, Fr. Michael Henderson, who lives at The Grove, offers Holy Communion weekly there. Thanks to Fr. Jim and Fr. Michael, we are successfully reaching this elderly population with spiritual and pastoral care.

**Food Pantry** - We've had a momentous transition recently from the long leadership of Stephen Moors to a new regime headed by Fred Kinch, with a steering committee support crew. So far, it seems to be working well, which is good, since we clearly have some current challenges (about which, more in a moment). I am attaching a roster that identifies everyone (that I know about anyway!) who is actively involved in some aspects of our operations, and it is broken into a few categories, many of which are rather fluid. Some people fill bags, some people unload trucks, some people greet our clients, and some people do the ordering and administrative work. Think of us as a collective! Anyway, the "Who Does What" worksheet identifies who these people are and what they do, while the associated "Contact Info" worksheet lists phone numbers and e-mail addresses for all of us. I hope this is a helpful resource, but please be aware that it's a fluid situation, always subject to change!

Now, a few words about the current situation: at a minimum, I can say that we are clearly helping to meet a real need in our community. Fred Kinch's innovations about our data tracking make it easier than ever to assess what's going on, and here are a few highlights from the July through September quarter:

- We served an average of 220 families a month during that period. (But: hold that thought! There will be a postscript!)
- Of those families, just over one-fourth (26%) represent single-person households, and another one-fourth (25%) are in two-person households. Note, though, that that means that almost half of our families (49%) have children at home, from infants to teens.
- Cumulatively, those families represent almost 1,200 individuals.
- Two-thirds of these individuals (67%) identify as Black, with the rest split among Whites (22%) and all others (11%). Those identifying as Hispanic are less than 2%.
- Just over one-third (34%) of the individuals are dependent children. The remainder are distributed across the age spectrum, including about one-fourth (24%) who are aged 60 or older.

As I say, though, there's more, as Fred Kinch has pointed out in his own assessment of the November data: we made 112 distributions on November 18 alone, and the full count for November – when we were only open on three Saturdays – was a recent high of 280 families in all. Most notable of all, though, was that we served 113 NEW families in November. As Fred put it: "I think that folks are really starting to feel the pinch of inflation, and looking at the alternatives available to help them feed their families. It won't surprise me to see this trend continue." So, that's where we're at, friends. Thanks for being part of this enterprise – there will be more to come!

**Church School Committee** - Church and School Committee Members: Mother Beth, Julianne Chester, Peter Klekamp, Brenda Hagen, Amy Vernon, Michele Proctor, Ida Thompson, Chris Corum. Robert and Rosetta Efthim. Janice Mazza, Mary Whitmire, Kay Carraway, Jim Bob and Joan Maddox, John and Joy Green, Tricia Culbertson, Frank Fincham, Bridget Garrett-James, Rick and Annie Wagner, Lisa Peerson. (Various other volunteers)

As a committee we work to create a bridge between the Church and the School. By creating moments of relationship building, hospitality and pastoral care, we are making connections that will support and service between the two places.

We offer annual, seasonal and all year opportunities. Throughout the year we send birthday cards including a small gift card to faculty and staff. Special thanks to Jancie Mazza for coordinating the delivery of these cards. Every Friday, John and Joy Green offer hospitality and coffee to parents and teachers attending chapel.

In August we offer Teacher gifts bags (85+) with various goodies as a welcome back gift. Thank you to Joan and JimBob Maddox and John and Joy Green for assembling these bags and making them so beautiful. Thank you to other members of the committee for providing a welcome back and handing out bags.

The altar guild provides support for several seasonal Eucharists (All School, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Easter and End of School). Each service must be set for approximately 150 communicants in Lower School and 150 communicants in Middle School).

The Fall Festival at HCES provides an opportunity for the Episcopal Schools Celebration in the outdoor chapel and the Church and School committee to engage with students and families. This year our craft was creating three large banners (for hanging in the Narthex) showing the theme of “running the race with perseverance”. Special thanks to Julianne Chester and Lisa Peerson for designing the banners.

We create and mail out both a Lent and Advent mailing to every family at HCES (400+) including devotional materials and an invitation to join us in worship at Holy Comforter Church.

I offer a Reading Together Bible Study course each year that is open to Church members, School staff and parents. This helps to bridge the gap between the church and school.

We welcomed National Junior Honors Society members to help with the Pancake Supper (Shrove Tuesday) and Glee Club Members to sing at the 70th Anniversary of Holy Comforter Church. Through my role as Chaplain I encourage two food drives to benefit Holy Comforter Food Pantry each year and encourage students to earn service hours through volunteering at the Food Pantry. I offer a monthly Praying Parents meeting and other outreach opportunities.

During Lent the committee helps me to host a Last Supper Re-enactment meal and a Passover Meal for Grades 5 and Grades 4 religion respectively.

This year we added Chair Yoga as an opportunity to bridge between the Church and the School.

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement.

Mother Beth Pessah

## **2023 HCES Scholarship Report**

In the 2023-2024 school year, we were once again able to provide a scholarship (50% of tuition and incidentals) for a student that met the scholarly requirements of the school and was identified as increasing the diversity of the student population. This student is pleasant and hardworking and participates in the classroom and various sporting activities. The plan going forward is to be able to continue to provide for this student throughout the remainder of their tenure at Holy Comforter. My hope is that we will be able to increase our scholarship base in future years.

I continue to challenge the other Episcopal Churches in the Deanery of Apalachee to consider raising a similar scholarship from their own congregations.

Mother Beth Pessah



**The Cuba Ministry** - Our two companion churches in Cuba, San Miguel y todos los Ángeles in Ceballos and Santiago Apóstol in Baraguá are still going strong under the care and dedication of our two companion priests, Mtr. Haydée Lugo Marrero and Fr. Roberto Faya Amaro, who is new to our companion church in Baraguá. Fr. Roberto occupies the rectory in Ciego de Ávila once occupied by our then companion priest, Fr. José Ángel Gutiérrez, who is living in Gainesville, FL with his wife and two of his sons. Fr. Roberto in addition to tending to the church in Baraguá has his main church of San Lucas in Ciego which is the companion church of the Mediator in Micanopy, FL. Mtr. Haydée has been given the charge of also tending to two other churches, those in the towns of Morón and Florencia. Both priests do this without the use of a vehicle! So they must rely on a hired driver or public transportation to tend to their churches. Since the pandemic, the economy in Cuba has gone from bad to worse with shortages of everyday items such as food, gas and even fuel for home cooking. It was recently announced that prices are set to go up again on these basic items. To that end, a trip has been organized to visit our companion churches during the second week of March. Our travelers from Holy Comforter are Judy Shipman, Jackie Watts. and Julie Sullivan. We will be staying in Ceballos for 5 days making trips to as many other churches as possible and bringing in much needed supplies such as chlorine for sanitizing the water tanks for the Living Waters system that we installed at the church in Ceballos as well as food, art supplies and Books of Common Prayer. A list of items needed at our companion churches will be published in the bulletin and in the Dove. In the past we have had lots of donations come in ahead of our trip and I am sure that this year will prove to be no different. Our companion relationship with our churches has been ongoing since 1998 and although we've had our ups and downs, it still remains strong. Our commitment to them is appreciated more than we can imagine and will remain so well into the future. Please contact Julie Sullivan at [jmsullivan32301@gmail.com](mailto:jmsullivan32301@gmail.com) for any questions you might have or to get on the list for future trips to Cuba. It is truly the adventure of a lifetime.

Submitted by Julie Sullivan

**Grace Mission Ministry** - In this last year, we'd like to begin our report by sharing a handful of the happenings at Grace Mission in 2023, and give a big THANK YOU to Holy Comforter for supporting us so well.

- We are so thankful for a wonderful celebration at Grace Mission Blues and BBQ, 2023! We are so grateful to Holy Comforter Episcopal Church family for hosting; The Instigators for rockin' us all night long; Lou and Mark Armesto and Fit-to Eat Catering for the scrumptious sides; to all who provided delicious desserts, and to everyone who supported this fun event!
- Additionally, we were blessed to have been able to serve 125 people a delicious Thanksgiving Dinner at Grace Mission! Turkey, stuffing, potatoes and green beans, roasted pineapple, and traditional desserts made this a day to remember. We thank God for Second Harvest and all those who cooked and those who served and cleaned up! That day was also our '3rd Thursday' giveaway, and 75 people were able to select from a variety of much needed items. Many thanks to all of those who donated clothing, bedding, and shoes!
- In addition to being a loving church community, Grace Mission also serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner weekly, holds a monthly clothing giveaway, provides a variety of services aimed at helping people maintain good physical, mental, and spiritual health, offers weekly showers and laundry assistance, and so much more! Without the help of our donors and volunteers, we could not adequately care for those the Lord brings to our door. In large part, this is done through the donation box at Holy Comforter; we have continued to see a steady stream of generosity – in activity items, bedding, clothing, food, shoes – literally, these boxes run over with good things!

And the donations from Holy Comforter come not only in the form of material goods, we are so very thankful for the donors we have that originate from our parish.

- We're also happy to share the good news that we received a grant from 100 Women Who Care - these funds will go a long way in furthering the repairs and programming at Grace Mission.
- Also in this season, we have prepared Angel Trees for the local Episcopal Churches, one of which was at Holy Comforter. With temperatures dropping, we desperately need warm clothing, gloves, hats, scarves, blankets, tents, and boots to help keep our neighbors warm and dry, and you will see many of these items represented on the trees. Thank you for those of you who donated one or more of these items to help us help our neighbors this holiday season!

Our continuing thanks for the support we see on a regular basis from St. John's parishioners – I pray I don't miss anyone, but if I did, please know we are so appreciative of all that you do!

Fr. Allen Hill  
Mtr. Beth & Fr. Steve Pessah  
Fr. Jim & Kathy May  
Carolyn DeSalvo  
Gary & Mary Heald

Brandy Luce  
Dave & Sandi Jacobsen  
Nancy Daniels & Marsha Jordan  
Bonnie & Lee McHugh  
Susan & Paul Robinson

Nancye & Howard Rubin  
Susan Crawford & Joe Travis  
Patricia Trom  
Jackie Watts

As always, thank you for the opportunity to report on Grace Mission... we continue to be so thankful for everything you do, and please know you are always welcome! We welcome any and all of your input, and for your continued prayers.

Thank you, and God's peace be with you,

Melanie Salsgiver

## CHURCH CARE

**Buildings & Grounds** - The committee provides a safe and suitable facility for worship and parish events with an emphasis on painting, repairing and replacement projects. There have been no major projects this year. Joe Watts and Alpha Holmes have kept the Church going on various small projects. That included keeping the air conditioners functioning for the sanctuary. They are the last units that need to be changed and probably the most important. Together they have accomplished both large and small repairs to keep them running. We look forward to a new year and new projects. Depending on funds, we want to replace the A/Cs for the sanctuary and replace the roof.

Jackie Watts

**Creation Care Committee** - The Creation Care Ministry group planned and volunteered for two Blessing of the Animals activities this year-one on St. Francis Day and the other on the Sunday prior. The Creation Care Ministry has set up recycling and composting stations with information for parishioners on how best to use these conservation practices. Composting collection bins can be found in the kitchen and large composting bins are located behind the Food Pantry portable for kitchen and plant scraps. Directions on how to use these are posted by the bins. Reminders to conserve electricity by turning off lights and using the thermostats wisely can be found throughout our building. Coffee cups and stir sticks have been changed to biodegradable materials. We are attempting to be polystyrene free so please avoid bringing in these types of disposable items. A dishwasher is available for groups wishing to use it as an alternative to disposables. Non-toxic methods are encouraged for weed control.

Susan Robinson

**Garden Guild** - The Garden Guild serves to maintain and beautify the church labyrinth garden through gardening workdays. All parishioners are welcome to participate. As part of the Good News Garden program through the national Episcopal Church we grow vegetables to include in the food pantry food distribution. Tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers were grown last summer.

Susan Robinson

**Capital Area Justice Committee** - The committee is a diverse, faith-filled, people-powered, Holy Spirit inspired ministry to address the injustices in our community. Five members of Holy Comforter Episcopal Church attended the Nehemiah Action event last spring. Local leaders were encouraged to work to reduce gun violence and improve access to affordable housing. Susan Robinson, our representative, has continued to receive updates on these efforts and will continue to share them with our parish. For more information go to <https://www.capitalareajustice.org>.

Susan Robinson

**Safety & Security Committee** - In April we changed the vendor providing monitoring and maintenance of the church's fire and security system. Previously we had two companies providing these services. Now we have just one company providing this service for better coordination at no additional cost.

Randy Desilet

**Greeters & Ushers Ministry** – The greeters and ushers welcome worshipers, especially visitors, to our Sunday services. One greeter is assigned to each service. Both services have people who rotate on a regular basis. Greeters' duties include greeting in the Narthex before the service, identifying and making personal contact with visitors, giving each visitor a welcome bag, and encouraging visitors to fill out and return a contact card.

Frances Fincham & Paul Robinson

## **SPIRITUAL LIFE**

Our **Spiritual Life** is central to the overall health and well-being of our congregation and the broader community in which we live and engage. As has been true in the years past, the Spiritual Life ministries continued to offer support to all who were the recipients of or chose to actively participate.

We encourage and support the spiritual lives of our members through our Card ministry, Grief Group, Children and Families and Youth programs, Men's Brotherhood, Banner Committee, Cursillo, Centering Prayer, Prayer Angels, Daughters of the King, and Spiritual Journey discussion group. Morning Prayer is conducted every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and is livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube

Holy Comforter's **Centering Prayer** group, although small, continued to meet for an hour every other week and experienced valuable spiritual lessons in ministry. The basic format of meditating for 20 minutes and then studying a Bible verse for the remaining time continued. The group read the chosen verse three times, reflected on its meaning, and shared individual insights. Each session provides deep spiritual nourishment to its participants.

The **Spiritual Journey** group also continued to meet every other week. Our discussions are based on books selected by the group. The group is not a traditional book club as we generally discuss one chapter at a time

or as the spirit moves. The books are enlightening, and the discussions and personal sharing are a large part of our make-up.

Most of our meetings were in person, though a few early in the year were via Zoom. We meet every other week in Mercy Lounge. Group members often volunteer to lead the discussion. Everyone is welcome.

**Banner Committee** - We made banners for baptisms and completed, blessed, and distributed prayer shawls.

Team members choose to meet as a group or separately to discuss the banner project, then each person takes home the materials needed to make a banner. We were so pleased to be able to continue this tradition.

Sandra Cartwright

**Card Ministry** - We are the team that sends out birthday and anniversary cards to active HCEC parishioners. We are a team of 5 people, 4 of whom send birthday cards and 1 sends anniversary cards. There are no meetings needed.

This year there were 355 birthday cards and 96 anniversary cards sent. We have the occasional sympathy card or just "Thinking of You" card. The purpose of the card ministry is to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries. It also lets our Holy Comforter family know we are thinking of them, especially on their special days. It does help to brighten those days. We are always happy to have anyone who is interested to join the card ministry.

Sandi Jacobsen

**The Prayer Chain** – There is a large group of parishioners who are interested in and willing to support anyone who chooses to submit a request for prayer. A request can be submitted by the individual requesting prayer, or a family member or close friend. If the desire for prayer is ongoing, the request can be resubmitted. All information remains confidential. The prayer chain is led by Jan Calvin.

**Cursillo** - Cursillo is getting back on track since Covid, and more opportunities are opening up for the parishioners of Holy Comforter. Even with the ups and downs the Dioceses has been going through the Cursillo Council and a large number of parishes with dedicated participants have helped maintain Cursillo to be strong and vibrant.

There is a Men's weekend scheduled for February 29 thru March 3rd. The Women's weekend is scheduled for March 7 thru March 10<sup>th</sup>. Then in the fall there will be a co-ed weekend being offered. More specifics of dates and times will be forthcoming.

The word Cursillo is Spanish for "short course in Christianity". Cursillo originated in Majorica Spain shortly after the Spanish Civil war. It has been embraced by many denominations, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian just to name a few over the past 80 years. A weekend offers the core tenets of the Christian faith as well as individual opportunity for personal growth and development. This gathering time is shared by folks like yourself who attend a weekend for growth and renewal. It could not be a better place to attend a weekend than at Camp Weed and lovely Mandy's Chapel.

Please speak with Bill and Pat Reineking at 850-309-1414 email wreineking@msn.com, or better yet plan to attend a meeting scheduled for Feb 22, 5:30 p.m. at Holy Comforter. We will have several folks from many local parishes attending. Simply let us know if you wish to attend. There will be dinner followed by a brief Eucharist.

Respectfully Bill and Pat Reineking

**Daughters of the King (DOK)** - The Daughters of the King is a worldwide order for women in the Episcopal Church (and others). Members pledge themselves to lives of prayer, service and evangelism.

The Mary and Martha Chapter of the Daughters of the King at Holy Comforter meet monthly. The monthly meetings include a study of Love is the Way by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. Members have participated in several Diocesan wide events via Zoom. Contributions are made regularly to the funds of the organization which support missions, education and the work of the Order. In addition, this year we were able to provide gift cards to Grace Mission staff at Christmas. We continue our ministry of prayer for members of the congregation and the community.

To learn more about the Daughters of the King and the discernment process for membership, contact Judy Shipman at [judyshipman4@gmail.com](mailto:judyshipman4@gmail.com)

Judy Shipman

**The Brotherhood** - The Brotherhood is a group open to all men in our Parish. The Brotherhood goals are to serve as both a social and spiritual meeting place for Holy Comforter men and to serve the special needs that arise within our community. The Brotherhood in 2023 met quarterly and hosted the Shrove Tuesday Celebration and a Summer Ice Cream Social.

The Brotherhood of Holy Comforter is open to any adult man who wishes to participate and help us serve. Please contact Chris Jester, Bill Reinking or any Brotherhood member for more information

**Children's Ministries** - Sunday School classes for a combined group of preschoolers, elementary students and middle schoolers were held in the Education Center. A cadre of three teachers and four shepherds rotated to deliver weekly instruction except during July when pew packets were available.

Several dozen children took part in the Easter egg hunt which was conducted with upper and lower division groupings.

"God is with me wherever I go!" was heard loudly and clearly throughout the week of July 17-21, as 24 children, five teens and 14 adults participated in Vacation Bible School. Another team of volunteer teens and adults decorated the church for the occasion.

A Ghoulish Goulash Halloween event took place in October along with a parent meeting to discuss upcoming activities.

Families received special activity packets for Lent and Advent.

A Youth Commission formed and began brainstorming ideas for youth engagement including service, fellowship, and life issues activities.

Advent wreath making, a Christingle service and caroling at The Grove occurred during Advent.

Families participated in the weekly Advent wreath lighting and readings at both services and the family Christmas Eve service featured the children's video, **Symbols of Christmas**.

Julianne Chester

## CHURCH COMMUNITY

Pastoral care is fundamentally about *relationships*. It is made up of various ministries that provide for times of compassionate presence. We have many examples of Jesus meeting people in their time need, especially those who were hurting, lonely or ill. Pastoral care creates an opportunity for healing and growth, both for the person being cared for, and for the caregiver.

Through this past year, the following pastoral care activities have been completed in an effort to care for the parishioners at Holy Comforter, and those that have sought healing here:

- Completed conversations with many of our Vestry, as to the current status of their commissions related to pastoral care, as well as referrals to Ministry Leaders for follow-up conversations
- Establish weekly Pastoral Team Meetings (Tuesdays at noon), as part of this developed/deployed a communication tool used to track calls/visits with parishioners, & used in these weekly meetings (since this was implemented on 7/11/23, 246 pastoral care episodes have been logged)
- Implemented the Walking the Mourner's Path<sup>©</sup> grief series, a Christ-focused workshop, in which HCEC is in ministry partnership with St. John's Episcopal Church (SJEC) (our Fall series ran 9/19/23-11/7/23 with 6 participants). We also offered an Advent "Service of Remembrance" in December, and in 2024 are implementing continuing offerings, such as a book study starting in January.
- In 2023, we refreshed/reimplemented a ministry that was active in the past - Stephen Ministry<sup>©</sup>. We both recruited new Stephen Ministers (2) and re-engaged those who served prior (8). This training was achieved over 2 sessions in the Fall - 10/28/23 & 11/18/23. The commissioning service for the new Stephen Ministers in January, and we will also recognize the re-commitment of those who re-trained at that time.
- Several other Ministries continue that are considered to be integral to Pastoral Care, for instance Fr. Jim May's weekly service at Westminster Oaks, Sandi Jacobsen's Card Ministry, Julianne Chester's Eucharistic Visitors, etc. and more may be added as we feel the Holy Spirit lead us.

One last thought respectfully submitted - communicating needs in the parish is foundational to Pastoral Care, as is timely hand-off to the right ministry support, and - likely this is the most important - discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing evaluation of our ministries at HCEC. We would ask for any and all of your input and prayers.

Thank you, and God's peace be with you.

Melanie Salsgiver

**Women's Fellowship** - This group is open to all women at Holy Comforter. We generally gather at the church, but occasionally have been invited to members' homes where appetizers and drinks are shared. Often it is a time to get acquainted and share with one another. There have been service projects, presentations, and activities planned in the past. This group is currently looking for a coordinator. We will schedule our first meeting of 2024 once we have a volunteer. Call the church office if you are interested in volunteering for this service opportunity.

**Food and Fellowship Clubs** - The Food and Fellowship Clubs replaced Supper Clubs held in previous years offering expanded opportunities for socializing. The six clubs formed were The Lively Lunch Bunch, Out

to Lunch, Dining Before Dark, The Classic Supper Club, and Lunch and a Movie. The groups have been meeting since early fall 2023.

Julianne Chester

**Book Discussion Group** - The book discussion group continued to meet every month during 2023. Participants are responsible for suggesting and selecting titles for each of the next three months ahead. The group meets on the second Sunday of every month at 5:00 PM in the church lounge. This is a social activity with refreshments available, and guests are always welcome. Any kind of book – fiction or nonfiction – is eligible for consideration, although during 2023 all the books we discussed were fiction. Our choices for the year just past included serious historic fiction, lighter current fiction and best-sellers, murder mysteries, and one contemporary classic. Once a title has been selected, information about the author and title is made available to the 38 individuals who are currently on the e-mail notification list (including a few non-parishioners). Typically, there are three notices or reminders sent every month to members. Non-members are always welcome, and information about our meetings is regularly posted prominently in the church bulletin and the E-Dove. During 2023, a total of 16 people attended at least once; our average monthly attendance was 8.7, with a range of 6 to 12 in any given month. A (almost!) complete list of all of the 200+ books the group has read since the group was initially organized in 2000 is readily available on request.

Robbie Brunger

**Men's Cooking Crew** - The HC Men's Cooking Crew provides a hearty breakfast for all to enjoy between services on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month. This long standing tradition provides an opportunity for our parishioners to gather together and share a delicious meal while discussing their lives, families, and the important activities that make Holy Comforter the vibrant place of worship that it is.

They also prepare meals for a wide variety of events and parish celebrations throughout the year.

**Hospitality Ministry** - The hospitality ministry has continued to provide coffee after both services and snacks after the 10:30 service. This was provided from January to May and September to December. We also provided cake and punch after several Baptisms, Confirmations, the Installation for Father Allen and the Anniversary celebration. We did not provide after service coffee on Easter, Mother's Day, the Sunday after Thanksgiving or on Christmas Eve.

A reception was held after two memorial services, one in the narthex and the other in the parish hall. The hospitality committee set up the tables, provided beverages and refreshments, helped with serving and cleaned up.

Other events that the hospitality ministry assisted with:

Decorations and set up for the welcome dinner for Father Allen

Decorations for the Good Friday Fish Fry

Decorating for the Easter Brunch

Provided cookies for Father's Day

Decorated and provided punch and snacks for the Tsukamoto Concert

Decorated for the Anniversary Celebration and provided the cake

Helped Grace Mission volunteers decorate for the Blues and Barbecue

Provided brunch food for the annual parish meeting and cleaned up after

Nancye Rubin

**Communications** – The Communications Team oversees the transmission of news and information of activities at our Parish. These include the weekly eDove, Social Media postings and the Quarterly Dove Magazine. Considering the Greater Church’s call is to spread the Good News, we are very much in the communication business. Chris There is no official contact for the Communications Team.

Kathleen Mellino

## **FINANCE**

### **Year End 2023**

From a fiscal perspective, 2023 was a good year. Holy Comforter finished the year with an excess of revenue over expenses in the amount of \$26,600.00.

However, that favorable result is tempered by the fact that during the year, Holy Comforter did not have a full complement of its staff. Specifically, Father Allen joined us in February and Kathleen Mellino, our administrative assistant, joined us in July.

To briefly summarize: For the year, total income was approximately \$571,000.00. Pledged income received was approximately \$469,000.00, which was 105% of the amounts members had pledged. Holy Comforter also received other income primarily from unpledged giving, including an estate gift, and donations to the food pantry.

Because total expenses for the year were \$544,000, Holy Comforter had an excess of revenue over expenses in the amount of \$27,000.00 (rounded to the nearest thousand)

In terms of its cash position, Holy Comforter, in its operating account, had on deposit \$58,337.82. Holy Comforter also maintains designated funds for amounts that have been set aside by the Vestry for extraordinary items or have been received from individuals who have requested restricted usage, such as the Building Fund and the Food Pantry Fund. The total of cash on deposit for all of the Designated Funds was \$165,202.17.

Andy Granger

## **DIOCESAN UPDATE**

2023 was a difficult year for the Diocese of Florida as a whole due to its failure to successfully consecrate a new Bishop Coadjutor. The process for doing so began the year before at a Special Diocesan Convention held in May of 2022. At that Convention, the Rev. Charlie Holt’s was elected on the third ballot. Following this Convention, a Letter of Objection to the election was received by the Diocese of Florida which generated an investigation by the Court of Review under The Episcopal Church. A report was issued by the Court of Review in August 2022, finding multiple deficiencies in the election process, most of which were procedural in nature. As a result of this, Fr. Holt withdrew his acceptance of the election result and the Diocese of Florida chose to move forward with a second election.

This second election took place in November of 2022, and Fr. Holt was declared the Bishop-Elect a second time. However, a second Letter of Objection was submitted to the Secretary of Convention of the Diocese of Florida, which ultimately resulted in another investigation by the Court of Review. In February 2023, the Court released its opinion, once again finding that there were irregularities in the election process which could have affected the outcome of the vote. Bishop Howard and the Standing Committee strongly



disagreed with those findings and issued a rebuttal. The diocese then had to wait to see whether the national church would ratify Fr. Holt's election. To do so, a majority of Diocesan Bishops and a majority of Diocesan Standing Committees would have to consent.

As we awaited the national church's decision, the diocese recognized the need to engage in a Listening Process to help heal divisions among us and restore unity and trust. The Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves, the former bishop of the Diocese of El Camino-Real and a highly trained mediator, was contracted to facilitate this Listening Process.

In July of 2023, Presiding Bishop Curry informed the diocese that the Episcopal Church had not consented to the election and that it was therefore null and void. As a result, the diocese had no Bishop-elect to replace Bishop Howard upon his retirement at the end of October. At that point, ecclesiastical authority over the diocese passed to the diocesan Standing Committee. Episcopal sacramental and pastoral duties were covered through the end of 2023 by the Rt. Rev. Jay Lambert, whom the diocese had contracted to serve in the role of Assisting Bishop. Since then, the diocese has been learning how to operate without a Diocesan Bishop in place and the adjustment has not always been easy.

In the meantime, Fr. Holt accepted a call to serve instead as Rector of St. Mark's Church in Jacksonville. Bishop Lambert ended his time as Assisting Bishop in December 2023 and the diocese contracted two other retired bishops to serve in that role: Bishop Scott Benhase (former Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia) and Bishop Chip Stokes (former Bishop of New Jersey). Another Diocesan Convention was held in November, at which some encouraging business was conducted. However, it also became clear that there were still major divisions within the diocese and a lack of trust in the process, highlighting again the need for the Listening Process.

That Listening Process will continue on Saturday, January 27th, when the Diocese will host a special Convocation at Camp Weed. This Convocation will be the first of three "listening sessions" held over a period of approximately six months. The clergy of the diocese (including Mtr. Beth and I), together with lay representatives from each congregation (including Judy Shipman and Melanie Salsgiver from our parish), will be gathering together to begin the process of healing and to build trust with one another. The stated goals of these sessions are to create an environment in which we can pursue:

- Psychological, spiritual, and relational health across the Diocese, where trust and sincere Christian love are shared between the Diocese and diocesan leadership, as well as between individuals;
- The flourishing of ministry across a theological spectrum;
- And, eventually, a productive environment in which to hold a successful episcopal election.

There is no clarity at this point when that episcopal election will be held. We are committed first to giving the Listening Process the time it requires, but we are also cognizant of the need to move forward before too long. There is a possibility that, instead of trying to elect a new Diocesan Bishop in the near future, we may instead seek a Provisional (or Interim) Bishop. We will keep you informed.

In the meantime, I ask for your prayers for the Standing Committee as it leads the diocese; for Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves as she oversees the Listening Process; for all who participate in that process, that their hearts may be prepared to engage productively and honestly in potentially difficult conversations; for the rebuilding of trust and unity in the diocese; and for the eventual election of a new Diocesan Bishop to lead us forward in the future.

--Fr. Allen

## **2023 VESTRY**

The Vestry met monthly in 2023. We were led by Mother Beth until Fr. Allen joined us in February. He chose Judy Shipman as Senior Warden, and the Vestry elected Chris Jester as Junior Warden. Patricia Trom assumed the role of Clerk, and Andy Granger took over the treasure's position. The good work of past clerk Carolyn DiSalvo and Treasurer Hollie Maddox was acknowledged.

A Vestry member was chosen as Liaison to each ministry group, to provide a means for two-way communication of accomplishment and needs.

Each Vestry meeting was opened with a scriptural reflection and prayer. The agenda included review and approval of the minutes of the prior meeting, prepared by Vestry Clerk Patricia Trom, followed by a review of the Finance Report led by Treasurer Andy Granger, highlighting any significant variances from the norm.

Following these items, Fr. Allen provided an update on prior and coming events and issues, as deemed appropriate. The remainder of the agenda focused on items which needed review, discussion, and possible action by the vestry. Discussion was often lively as we sought to review and prioritize the goals and needs of the Parish, but the meetings remained a safe space in which all could participate.

The parish Annual Meeting was held in November 2023, following the Diocesan Annual Meeting. At that time, it was decided to hold a special meeting in February to review the events of 2023 and elect new Vestry members.

Vestry meetings are open to parishioners, except on those occasions when an executive session is required.

Judy Shipman, Senior Warden

Respectfully submitted

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