

2022 Annual State of the Church Report

 2022 was a year of many answered prayers and much renewed hope for the future of our church. We made it through some very hard times and now are gradually moving forward to new possibilities for our Church. The path through 2022 brought new life involving a new pastor, new members, new growth, new experiences, and new chances for this Church to live out its mission in this community. I believe the future holds such promise and 2023 will be a pivotal time in the life of this Church, as previously stated by Craig in a recent Newsletter article. Just think about the many prayers that have been answered and the many blessings we have shared this past year.

 We began the year with our financial status again stable and reflecting much the same giving patterns as in past years. The monetary support of this Church has never wavered in its 33-year lifetime, and it continued throughout 2022. Northminster experienced a 1st, when we ended with the best giving year in our history, as undesignated giving surpassed the total of our financial ministry plan. Truly unbelievable! A huge, unexpected blessing!

 At the beginning of 2022 we were 6 months into the pastor search process and the Pastor Search Committee was struggling but continuing to persevere as we pursued and considered dwindling potential pastoral candidates. Thankfully, as we all know, a few months later our prayers were answered. We began talking with Rev. Jillian Hankamer in March and very soon, the Search Committee knew we had found the one. The interview process continued over the next 4 months resulting in Jillian accepting our call, moving from Pennsylvania to Louisiana, and ultimately preaching her first sermon in our pulpit on July 31st. When Jillian first arrived, I told her, my prime goal for my remaining 5 months as Coordinating Council Chair was to do whatever I could to help her settle in, get to know our Church and our people, and generally become comfortable in this pastorate. At her request, at the beginning of her 2nd week here, we began meeting every Monday morning to discuss Northminster Church – its structure and function, its peoples’ needs, its programs, and its mission in this community. There were no off-limit questions or subjects. Jillian has been with us 5 months now and I have to say, my feeling from the very first was that she came in and felt right at home here. Perhaps it is because she thinks somewhat like us and shares a similar belief in our collective Church purpose and mission. Jillian, you are truly an answer to many prayers here at Northminister. We are so grateful you were willing to join us on this journey.

 The Church began last year still mindful of COVID’s impact, consequences, and the need for continuing cautions. However, we moved forward with determination into the years’ seasonal celebrations, services, activities, mission efforts and Commission work. We were without a pastor from July 2021 through July 2022, and during that time, the Church relied on the gracious gifts of several of our members helping to fill our pulpit each Sunday. We all must thank and show appreciation to Dr. Welton Gaddy, Dr. Darrell Cluck, Dr. D.H. Clark, Dr. Debra Chandler, and Rev. Mark Windham for the many times they stepped up to our pulpit and shared wondrous words of wisdom. We also had several out-of-town pulpit guests that filled in; Rev. Steve Jolly, Rev. Sheila-Sholes Ross, Dr. James Lamkin, Dr. Scott Stearman, Rev. Jason Smith, Rev. Kendall Rathaus, Rev. Paula Dempsey, Rev. Elijah Zehyoue, and Dr. Carl Gregg. Some were old friends we had not seen in many years and others new friends. All were so appreciated and essential in keeping our Sunday services going. I would like to say a special thanks to Craig Henry who partnered with me during that year of being without a pastor, as we coordinated all these pulpit guests. Craig, you were my rock during that time, and it never once occurred to me that we would falter in that essential and critical task. I must say a big thanks to all the Church staff and members of the Worship Commission who worked diligently with each pulpit guest each Sunday to craft meaningful and spiritually uplifting services. This was no small or easy accomplishment. Everyone was especially vigilant and worked hard to make sure that each service ran smoothly.

 As per our Church calendar Commission work and activities continued throughout the year. The Missions Commission continued to provide monthly mission giving opportunities each month. February brought another 1st for Northminster when a family of 10 joined our Church, the Kimble-Keens, and immediately our children’s program became alive again. All 8 children were then baptized in September, and it became Jillian’s 1st experience in a bayou. In March we had an Ash Wednesday service and April bought the Easter season with special services and activities for all; a Children’s Easter Egg Hunt and Family Luncheon, Holy Week Lunch Meditations, Maunday Thursday service, Good Friday service with a choral offering of Rutter’s “Requiem, all ending with Easter Sunday services.

 We moved toward spring and summer activities; honoring graduates on a Graduation Sunday in May and making plans for Vacation Bible School and Baptist Youth Camp summer opportunities for the children and youth. Thanks to all the Education Commission members, Sunday School teachers and Sunday night activity leaders for all the hard work that went into planning and making these experiences happen throughout the year. I must mention the newest children’s opportunity, a children’s sermon during the Sunday service started soon after Jillian joined us. The adults seem to enjoy and learn as much as the children during this time. Also, the past summer, the Arts Commission sponsored an art show of the works done by the very talented Ella Mayfield in June.

 Fall activities began with Jillian’s installation service in September followed by the Stagg Lecture event, a Halloween Get-Together sponsored by the Family Ministry Commission and an All-Saints Day service sponsored by the Columbarium Commission, all in October. A New Member’s Orientation/Inquirer’s Class and the Agape Meal occurred in November and ended with a Hanging of the Greens Service bringing us into the Advent season. We enjoyed our usual special Advent services each Sunday in December along with Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Services and always our well attended chili supper to round out the Advent celebration. Unfortunately, our well-prepared and much anticipated choral presentation of the “Messiah” was cancelled due to bad weather, but we did enjoy a special Piatigorsky Concert in early December. It really was a year full of wonderful opportunities to experience times of fellowship, spiritual growth, and fun for our church family!

 A special thanks to the Properties Commission and several other caring people in the church for all their hard work this last year in keeping this building and grounds maintained. We have been reminded several times over the last few years that we have an aging building that is now requiring more and more maintenance, and many times, replacement or refurbishment of the structure and its inside equipment. In 2022 the following repairs or replacements occurred:

- Demolishing the badly decaying cabinet on the back patio, and repair gas leak

- Repair of facia boards and applying vinyl trim

- Power washing areas of the building and church sign

- Repair of a roof leak

- Repair of ceiling water leaks due to the roof leak and AC unit overflows, and the painting of Jillian’s office and the front portico– much thanks to Jimmy Curry

- Updating the security system

- Repair or replace some units of the air conditioning system

- Replace the sign – Thanks to DH Clark

- Replace the kitchen hot water heater

- Repair the Ice machine – Thanks to Bill Kight

- Clearing of our bayou lot and maintenance of shrubbery beds around the Church

- Purchase of a new wireless microphone system

- Purchase of a new computer for Jillian’s use

- Purchase of new monitor for the church office

- Construction of a new pulpit rail for safety

This past year we have made some significant decisions that reflect our Church’s purpose and mission in this community. Early in 2022 a Welcoming and Affirming Statement was drafted and approved by the church. This was followed later in the year by the Coordinating Council recommending the church join AWAB (Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptist). These actions affirm our ongoing “ministry of inclusion” which has been our practice since the inception of this Church.

During the latter part of 2022, I recommended to the Coordinating Council that a sub-committee be formed to review and revise, if needed, our Church By-Laws, because it has been many years since the last review. That committee is still working and should be making some recommendations to the Council during the first quarter of this year.

Early last year the Coordinating Council discussed some goals and plans for the year. In that process we also talked about what we do and don’t do well as a Church. We came up with 3 areas that need improvement.

1. Education has always been a concern, especially for children and youth. The most difficult task is finding workers, and that still has not changed to this day. Our Education Commission is doing an admirable job, but they need help now, especially since we are blessed with greater numbers in this area.
2. Outreach seems to have fallen by the wayside in our church. I’m sure everyone here can think of someone that was with us before COVOD that isn’t here now. Where are they and why aren’t they coming anymore. We need to be more intentional about contacting our members and make plans to find ways to bring new people in.
3. Telling our story or letting people know who we are.

I think these three areas are still a major concern for Northminster and need ongoing attention.

In conclusion, I really do believe Northminster Church is poised to have a stellar year in 2023. We are so ready to put the struggles of COVID years and the season of being without a pastor behind us. It is time to move forward together and embrace new people, new ideas, new opportunities, and new experiences, and that will only happen if we accept “intentional change” for the good of this Church and its future. You know, we all think at times, I hope the church will do this or be that or I wish there was this program or that activity here. My challenge is if you want this church to be or do something, or have certain things, then you must also be willing and committed to being part of the solution. Northminster will grow and realize its mission in this community only as much as each member commits and works to make it happen.

Let’s all look forward to great times in 2023 and work together to make this the best year yet in the life of our Church!

Grace and Peace to you all!

Peggy Burns