

TEXAS FIJI

The Longhorn Fiji – The University of Texas at Austin
Established 1883

Fall 2025



The Enduring Call of Fiji OUR BROTHERHOOD IS FOR LIFE

In fall 2002, I woke up in my room at Buen Retiro with a strange, almost unsettling realization: my life's calling might be ordained ministry. Exploring that call felt far too vulnerable and too strange to pursue on my own. The only reason I found the courage to lean in was because the new minister across the street, **Miles Brandon '92**, had been a Texas Fiji just eight years earlier. That bond gave me the confidence to reach out.

What began as a simple conversation grew into a mentoring relationship and, eventually, an internship that launched me toward seminary and the path of ordained ministry. More than a career direction, what it gave me was the steady presence of a Fiji brother a few years ahead, walking with me through the uncertain transition of discerning my vocation.

Stories like mine are not unusual. They are living proof of our motto: Phi Gamma Delta is "Not for college days alone." Fijis understand that brotherhood extends well beyond our time in the house and into every chapter of life. Being a Fiji means shaping men of integrity, perseverance, and service, and alumni support ensures that undergraduates don't just hear those values, but they see them lived out in real relationships.

For some, that support looks like mentorship, career guidance, or a simple word of encouragement. For others, it takes the form of financial generosity by sustaining our house, strengthening our programs, and securing a foundation for generations to come. Whatever shape it takes, the impact is unmistakable: young men becoming better leaders, stronger friends, and more faithful brothers.

As we look toward the future of Texas Fiji—with new renovations, new pledge classes, and new opportunities—we remember that the heart of our brotherhood isn't found in bricks or budgets, but in the men who keep showing up for one another across generations.

So whether it's been two years or 20 since you last walked through our doors, consider this your invitation to reconnect. Mentor a student. Come to Pig Dinner. Share your story. Your presence matters because Fiji is not for college days alone.

GTBO,
The Rev. John Newton '00
Head of the BCA
jnewt@gmail.com

THANK YOU,
LOYAL DONORS

*Texas Fiji Thrives
with Your Support*

Our deepest thanks to the alumni who supported Texas Fiji this year. Your generosity helps strengthen the house, support leadership and scholarship, and ensure that "Not for college days alone" remains more than a motto.

Brothers, as we look to the next pledge class, we invite you to give back by contributing to the recruitment fund, which helps us attract and develop the next generation of outstanding Fijis. Your gift, regardless of size, makes a lasting impact. Scan the QR code to visit texasfiji.causevox.com and give today!





THROUGH THE FLOOD

The Reverend Bert Baetz '97 on Fraternity, Ministry, and Hope

FRATERNITY MEMORIES

As I entered UT, I saw how solid friendships were established through fraternities.

During Rush, the Phi Gam Captains stood out. They were not just fun, but they showed me what true Fraternity is. I wanted to belong to an authentic brotherhood.

During my sophomore year, **Brett Taaffe '95**, invited me to a Bible Study in the Chapter room. That experience shaped my path in life and sparked the curiosity that eventually led me into ministry.

MINISTRY WORK

As a finance major at the Business School, my time with the Phi Gam Bible Study planted a seed for my interest of theology, which led me to Duke Divinity School. After graduating from Duke with a Master of Divinity, I taught history and theology at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Austin. My students and my parish community, St. David's, encouraged me to discern the call to ordained ministry. In 2008, I was ordained at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston alongside **John Newton '00**.

From there, I served at St. Mark's in South Austin and then as Rector of St. Mark's in Richmond, Texas. Since 2017, I have served as Rector of St. Peter's in Kerrville. Here, parish life and community life are inseparable. When I was ordained, I vowed to love and serve all

people—young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor—and that vow continues to guide me, as I see all of Kerr County as my “parish.”

HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HILL COUNTRY

That calling to serve the greater community became especially clear on July 4, when flooding devastated our community. My daughter was at Camp Mystic, and while her cabin was safe, many families suffered heartbreak loss. That day, I wore many hats: father, priest, friend, and community leader. I waited at Ingram Elementary, the reunification site, praying with families until I was reunited with my daughter. Once she was safe, I spent the evening with parents who had lost children. Later that night, my wife and I had to tell our own children that their friend Renee had died. I told them how we would move forward—by leaning on the love of God who is always with us.

Two days later, I shared a similar message with our church. Six parishioners had died, and our community was grieving deeply. Nevertheless, God was with us. The Lord says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (Isaiah 43:2). Though we were walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord was with us. It has been several months since the flood, and I know the God who has been there every step of the way, shining his light in the darkness.

In the days that followed, St. Peter's moved quickly. We purchased an RV to serve as a mobile relief unit in Hunt. We provided shelter for victims and first responders, distributed

gift cards in Ingram, and partnered with the Community Foundation to award grants to more than 200 families. We also opened a “pop-up” chapel in Hunt, the center of the devastation, where worship continues today.

Disaster recovery occurs in three phases: relief, recovery, and rebuilding. Today our recovery efforts are focused on mental health and housing. We established a Recovery Village in Hunt to house case managers, counselors, and provide community gathering spaces. Thanks to our partnerships with the Children's Bereavement Center and the Institute for Spirituality and Health, we are committed to the long-term mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of our community. Through our partnerships with Episcopal Relief and Development, Habitat for Humanity, and generous donors, we continue helping families rebuild their homes. Thanks be to God; we are here to provide help and hope for the Hill Country.

LIFE TODAY

My wife, Sarah, and I have been married for 18 years, and we are raising our two children, Eloise and Oliver, here in Kerrville. We enjoy family dinners, time at the ranch, and Saturday nights at Crider's. Looking back, I am grateful for how Phi Gam shaped my path. My encouragement to other brothers is simple: keep the faith and remain grateful for the doors God opens through Phi Gamma Delta. Good to be one!

Fraternally,
Reverend Bert Baetz '97
bert@stpeterskerrville.com

Once a Fiji, Always a Fiji



The pledge class of 2003 gathers in Pedernales Falls at Beaman Ranch.



Tucker Hughes '00, Will Walters '00, Matt Frizzell '00, and Rogan Giles '00 meet up for some rounds of golf.



Will Denton '00 and Kemper Cowden '00 attend the US Open in NYC.



The sophomore member class traveled to the home of Price Daniel '24 in Austin before the Texas vs. Sam Houston game.



Brothers clean up well for dinner at the Club House during a golf trip to The Vintage Club in Palm Springs, California, last May.

Strong Bonds, Strong Service

TEXAS FIJI'S YEAR IN REVIEW

Texas Fiji's 205 total members, including a new member class of 36, greet you! In the spring, the Chapter ranked 12th among all Fraternities in GPA, with an average of 3.48, compared to the IFC average of 3.56. Breaking that down further, our members earned a GPA of 3.48, while new members averaged 3.44. By comparison, the IFC averages were 3.57 for members and 3.42 for new members. This is a strong showing for our new Fijis!

Service remains at the heart of our brotherhood. In spring 2025, we logged 1,252 service hours and raised \$5,000 for the B+ Foundation, one of our highest totals in recent years. This success is thanks to the dedication of our philanthropy chairmen, **William Logan Smith '23** and **Nico Dieterichs '23**, whose leadership set a high bar for future efforts.

Texas Fiji continues to make an impact beyond our walls as well. **William Anderson '23** currently serves as head social chairman for IFC, and **William Logan Smith '23** is head philanthropy chairman. We're also proud to

celebrate **Alex Gottsagen '22**, who serves as president of the Texas Cowboys, the university's oldest men's service organization, which is a tremendous honor for one of our brothers. Looking ahead, the Chapter has set an ambitious goal to raise \$40,000 for Central Texas flood relief this fall and again exceed 1,000 hours of community service.

On the home front, we're working to strengthen brotherhood and alumni connections. This fall, we're planning more frequent social gatherings to deepen bonds within the Chapter. In addition, **Tucker Sachs '22** and our alumni chairmen, **James Cooley '23** and **Charlie Schmidt '23**, are developing a new alumni portal to connect undergraduates and alumni on one central platform. The portal is set to launch next year and will be an exciting step toward building a more connected Fiji network.

GTBO,
Lewis Montgomery '23
Outgoing Chapter President



Fiji juniors and seniors enjoy their annual ski trip to Telluride, Colorado, in early January.

Alumni News

Mace L. Brindley '66 is a retired otolaryngologist. Email: larmarloyd@aol.com

John K. Turner '73 recently started Providence Investment Partners, a private equity firm in Dallas, Texas. He has 10 grandchildren and stays busy. Email: johnthomas1950@gmail.com

Brent A. Biggs '83 is practicing law in Odessa, Texas. Email: khunter@cswdevelopment.com

Charles M. Lane '03 is working hard and raising his kids. Email: brentbiggs@outlook.com

Milam Miller '08 published his first leadership book, *The Charisma Craft*, in June 2025. It's available now on Amazon.

GOALS for 2025-26

1

Raise more than \$40,000 in relief funds for the Central Texas flooding.

2

Promote growth between pledge classes by implementing bi-monthly dinners between randomly selected members.

3

Raise our GPA to above 3.5.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Catch up with your Fiji brothers and see how the spirit of "Not for college days alone" is thriving! In this issue: stories of service from Reverends **John Newton '00** and **Bert Baetz '97**, Chapter highlights from 2025, photos from alumni reunions, and ways to stay involved through mentoring, giving, and recruitment referrals. Stay connected. Show up. Pay it forward!

TEXAS FIJI

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SAVE the DATE!

Mark your calendars for

PIG DINNER
April 18, 2026

More details coming soon!

Follow us online at texasfiji.com

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Cox Bennett | Houston, Texas
Nick Bennett | Houston, Texas
Henry Bourret | Dallas, Texas
Thomas Barrow | Dallas, Texas
Hunt Conger | San Antonio, Texas
Jackson Crosswell | Houston, Texas
William Daly | Houston, Texas
Holland Deane | Austin, Texas
David DeVega | Dallas, Texas
Oliver Duffin | San Antonio, Texas
Lawson Duncan | Houston, Texas
Andrew Edwards | Fort Worth, Texas
Gray Gammill | Houston, Texas
Philip Genung | Houston, Texas
Witt Greer | Austin, Texas
Hudson Groth | Dallas, Texas
Marshall Haggard | Dallas, Texas
Roy Jenkins | Beaumont, Texas

Philip Khalil | Houston, Texas
John Lathan | Austin, Texas
Stuart Matthews | Dallas, Texas
Sam Montgomery | Dallas, Texas
Bennett Moss | Dallas, Texas
Andrew Nelson | Austin, Texas
Andrew Parks | Austin, Texas
Will Peeler | Austin, Texas
Jack Ray | Dallas, Texas
Hilton Sampson | Dallas, Texas
Miles Sanders | Amarillo, Texas
Lawson Stouse | Austin, Texas
Angus Wall | Dallas, Texas
Thompson White | Houston, Texas
Carson Wiles | Dallas, Texas
Jack Winterle | Dallas, Texas
Nelson Wright | Austin, Texas
Grant Young | Houston, Texas

WE ASKED THE NEW MEMBERS **Why Texas Fiji?**

"I wanted to become a Fiji because right away after I saw the members truly cared about not only ensuring my pledge class had a tight-knit bond with each other, but also with everyone in the Chapter."

—**Nick Bennett '25**

"I wanted to become a Fiji because of the strong values of brotherhood that the Chapter displays, and how everyone lifts each other up and celebrates others' successes as their own."

—**Stuart Matthews '25**

"I joined because of the tight brotherhood that stood out over any other Fraternity. I also have many family ties and have seen what kind of men Texas Fiji members become."

—**Sam Montgomery '25**

KNOW A FUTURE FIJI? | Refer Them Today

Help us find the next generation of Texas Fijis!

Submit your referrals to Head Rush Captain **Jake Watts '23** at (469) 401-5212 or jakewatts323@gmail.com.
Include the student's name, contact information, legacy connections, and why you think they would be a good fit for our brotherhood.