Our Mission

To live for God
To serve Christ
To be moved by the Holy Spirit and
To spread the Good News by our actions serving the larger community
AN OPEN LETTER TO THE FUTURE RECTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH

Welcome to the Episcopal Church of the Messiah, a church with an abundantly rich tradition and history – a church that is actively seeking pastoral leadership to carry us from a period of transition to a period of growth, renewal, and abounding love.

Messiah is full of love, commitment, and belief, and has been well-led by an interim rector for two years as we restored our facilities and built our memorial garden with columbarium. The people of Messiah are now seeking a rector to join their church in mission and ministry.

We invite you to journey with us through the next pages to learn about the Church of the Messiah – her past, her present, her future. We invite you to immerse yourself in what exists now and imagine what can be as we join talents and work with active and strong lay leaders, hard-working volunteers, a united Vestry, and a devoted congregation.
HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH

The Church of the Messiah is the oldest church building in Gonzales and is believed to be the oldest public building used continuously for its original purpose. It was organized as a mission congregation of the Episcopal Church in 1852. Services were first held in private homes and in public buildings. In 1879 the vestry requested a half-block be leased to the Episcopalians from the City of Gonzales, for a sum of $1 for 99 years. The lease was renewed for the next century.

The Rural Gothic building was completed and consecrated in 1881. It is of cypress construction with coupled stone foundations. Much of the lumber and timbers were hauled from the Gulf Coast and Florida by oxcart. Much of the interior finish wood is of rare Black Walnut from the Guadalupe River bottoms. Except for the window in the baptismal apse, the stained and painted glass windows in the nave are original to the church.

In 1928, the rector reported that the church “was rebuilt and new furnishings added.” The cruciform plan of the building was completed by adding a room for the organ pipes. A new tower was built of stone from a local quarry and moved to the corner of the building. The new baptistry and beautiful stained-glass window were added where the old tower stood. In 2023 the sacristy was updated, the walls insulated, floors and pews refinished, and the altar moved away from the west wall.
The Organ was designed and built by the Pilcher Organ Company of Louisville, Kentucky in 1928 and was presented to the church by the local Ladies Society. At that time, it was one of only five in Texas. In 1996, the church was able to have this wonderful instrument rebuilt and extended. The new Walnut console and case front match the material and design of the communion rail. The instrument has been regularly cared for and tuned by a professional organ company; and in 2023 MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) equipment was installed so the organ could be controlled and played remotely.

Our Church Rectory

The first priests serving this small congregation in Gonzales were often visiting priests, or they served several churches such as Gonzales and Luling, so the need for a Rectory as a permanent residence for the priest was not a consideration. In 1886 the rectory located next to the church building was constructed and ready for occupancy by the Rev. Nathanial B. Fuller. In 1914 the rectory was replaced with the current building with the columned porch and a balcony. In 1940 a fire damaged the upstairs rooms and attic, and the balcony was removed in the repairs. The most recent renovation in 2020 converted the first floor to offices and a conference room. A new rectory was purchased and modernized on St. Vincent Street in 2020.
### MEMBERSHIP AND AVERAGE SUNDAY ATTENDANCE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Sunday Attendance</th>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023</td>
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*Year of the pandemic

### MESSIAH’S STAFF

Administrator: Esther Bell  
Administrative Assistant: Liz Reiley  
Treasurer: Lucianne Blakemore  
Guitarist: Robert Williamson  
Sexton: Robert Padilla  
Housekeeper: April Barrington

2022 CONSTRUCTION – PARISH HALL AND COLUMBARIUM
THE CITY OF GONZALES

Gonzales, the county seat of Gonzales County, is at the confluence of the Guadalupe and San Marcos rivers, on U.S. highways 90, 97, and 183 in the north central part of the county. It was surveyed by James Kerr as the capital of DeWitt's colony in 1825 and named for Rafael Gonzales, governor of Coahuila and Texas. On October 2, 1835, Texans led by John H. Moore resisted Mexican dragoons sent to retrieve the town cannon. Challenging the Mexicans to "come and take it," the Texans rallied around the gun and fought the battle of Gonzales, the first skirmish of the Texas Revolution. On October 11 Stephen F. Austin took command of the volunteer army that had concentrated at Gonzales and prepared for the siege of Bexar. The following February the Gonzales Ranging Company of Mounted Volunteers rode to the aid of William Barret Travis's command during the battle of the Alamo, where the thirty-two men of the Gonzales contingent perished on March 6, 1836.

In 1837 the Republic of Texas incorporated Gonzales and established Gonzales County, but the city council did not have its first meeting until March of 1839. Gonzales was incorporated in 1880 and had six churches, daily mail service, four schools, a courthouse, two banks, a 500-seat opera house, a library, gas and water works, several lodges, gristmills, cotton gins, several stores, and a population of 2,900 in 1884. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Gonzales was also home to a considerable number of African American landowners, notably members of the Price family. Descendant Walter Price went on to achieve acclaim as a blues player.

In 2020 the population was 7,098. The Gonzales Museum, established in 1936, houses a collection of historical artifacts and weapons. The Eggleston House, a restored dog-trot cabin maintained by the town, is perhaps the finest example of its type. The old 1887 jailhouse is also preserved and in 1989 served as headquarters of the Gonzales Chamber of Commerce. Special events include the annual Come-and-Take-It Days, which observes the Gonzales legacy as the "Lexington of Texas."
SUNDAY WORSHIP

The Episcopal Church of the Messiah celebrates the Holy Eucharist at 10:30 each Sunday morning, with an average Sunday attendance of 30, or 54% of our active membership. During the 2020 COVID pandemic, in person worship averaged only 19, so we have recovered our pre-pandemic attendance and grown by about 6% over 2019.

Messiah’s Altar Guild of four members prepares the sanctuary for all services on Sunday morning and other special services (Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, etc.)

Music is an important part of our worship. On the first Sunday of each month, Dr. Bob Williamson leads with his guitar and Steve Sucher with his voice. Because of the near impossibility of finding and hiring an organist in a small town, the recent installation of MIDI equipment in our Pilcher organ console enables us to use that instrument for worship, controlled by an iPad in the hands of a parishioner.

Messiah is blessed to have one child who serves as our crucifer each Sunday.

While the church was being restored, we worshiped in the recently renovated parish hall.

Music was provided by the piano and by guitar.
Thanks to the beneficence of the late William Sayers, the Episcopal Church of the Messiah has been financially blessed by the mineral rights he left us. When the oil companies started their work a decade ago, the Vestry decided to use 10% of the income to set up a “Tithe Fund” using the interest from investments. Since 2013 our Tithe Fund has responded to needs from Gonzales to the Diocese of West Texas and beyond, all the way to Uganda. Of the assistance we have provided (over a half-million dollars) twenty percent of that amount has been beyond Gonzales County.
The ability to be so generous is not our doing. We did not contribute to the fund, but we have responded to God’s call to care for the poor, downtrodden, and needy. We never lose sight of the offertory phrase, “All things come of Thee, O Lord.”

Messiah is a strong supporter of Gonzales Independent School District in numerous ways. Back to school funds are provided for school counselors and nurses. Items are also collected throughout the year and delivered when needed. We are strong supporters of the Special Needs programs. We have provided funds for field trips, a special needs prom and mums for Homecoming. Each child in prekindergarten is given a book on their birthday thanks to our outreach.

BSA Troop 262 meets weekly in the parish hall and serves 20 boys. A High Adventure program (Venturing Crew 263) meets once a month.

AA meets twice a week in the parish hall – this 12-step recovery program helps many residents recover from addiction and remain sober.

On Shrove Tuesday, the parish hosts a Pancake Supper for all people from the surrounding area. This event gives us the opportunity to host the community and to show off our recently renovated and restored facilities.

Once a month, members of Messiah meet for dinner at the Elks Club. This event gives us the opportunity to invite friends and neighbors to introduce them to our church in an informal setting.

Messiah contributed to the establishment of a YMCA in Gonzales. The Y has established an after-school program to tutor and otherwise care for children in our schools.

The Edwards Center is the only remaining facility in Texas that once housed a school for African American children. One of the buildings holds a museum. The Church of the Messiah helped acquire and install cooling fans in the gymnasium and contributed to roof repair and replacement for this “gem of a gym.”
The Lions Park is a popular place for youth and families throughout the city. Through our Tithe Fund we assisted in the modernization of a playground for our youngest citizens.

Gonzales Christian Assistance Ministries (GCAM) was established in 1996 as a non-profit to aid those in need in the Gonzales community as well as surrounding areas. They are housed in an easy to access facility provided by the Episcopal Church of The Messiah. GCAM is governed by a Board of 12 Directors led by an elected president. Approximately 10 churches in Gonzales support the ministry, both monetarily and spiritually. They also work closely with the Victoria Food Bank. Local businesses contribute food weekly. GCAM also has a thrift store open to the public as well as drop boxes for donated items that contribute support to its mission. They serve approximately 90 families per week. On Fridays, Prayer Warriors are available for those wanting prayer. Helping God’s less fortunate is what this ministry is all about!

The parish has provided stipends to seminarians from the Diocese and scholarships for college students and Ugandan orphans. We have been blessed to respond to natural and manmade tragedies on the Gulf Coast, in the Hill Country and Uvalde. Our Tithe Fund has enabled us to support the chapel renovation at Camp Capers, the camp at Mustang Island, the Good Samaritan Center in San Antonio, and College and Young Adult ministry in the diocese.

*All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.*
## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### OPERATIONS

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### ANNUAL BUDGET

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### FINANCES

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### ASSETS BEYOND THE MAIN CAMPUS

- GCAM valued at $165,910
- Rectory valued at $233,940

### OIL INCOME

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<td>$258,476</td>
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### TITHE FUND: $798,715.00

- Diocesan appeals: $71,645.00
- Seminarians: $29,600.00
- Uganda Orphans: $5,000.00
- Storm relief: $4,500.00
- Oil Patch Chaplains: $2,000.00
- Memorials/funerals: $10,000.00
- Gonzales County: $504,557.00
- REMAINING: $183,623.00
To You, Our Next Rector, we begin with who we are:

On February 4, 2024, at our parish-wide meeting, the people of Messiah said our strengths were:

- Extraordinary outreach and service to the community, diocese and beyond
- Wonderful church history
- A small congregation that feels like a family
- Lively after worship fellowship in the Parish Hall

With the foundation of who we are, Messiah recognizes the challenges we face.

- Attracting a new rector
- Growing in numbers
- Attracting families with children
- Aging congregation (only one child)

With optimism for the future, Messiah moves to opportunities for growth.

- That the church will continue to thrive and be joyful
- That we continue our mission and grow our congregation
- That the parish will be grounded, confident, approachable and accessible
- Able to reach the hurting, searching, helpless, hopeless humans of all ages in our community to offer the hope that God offers generously to us

So, with joyful hope, we look at who we are and how we want to grow, and we seek a priest with qualities to support us:

- Active involvement and visibility in the community
- Emphasize spiritual growth of the members
- Pastoral care that includes visiting the sick, bereaved, and homebound
- Strong, energetic preaching that relates the Gospel to our daily lives
- Support a strong music program