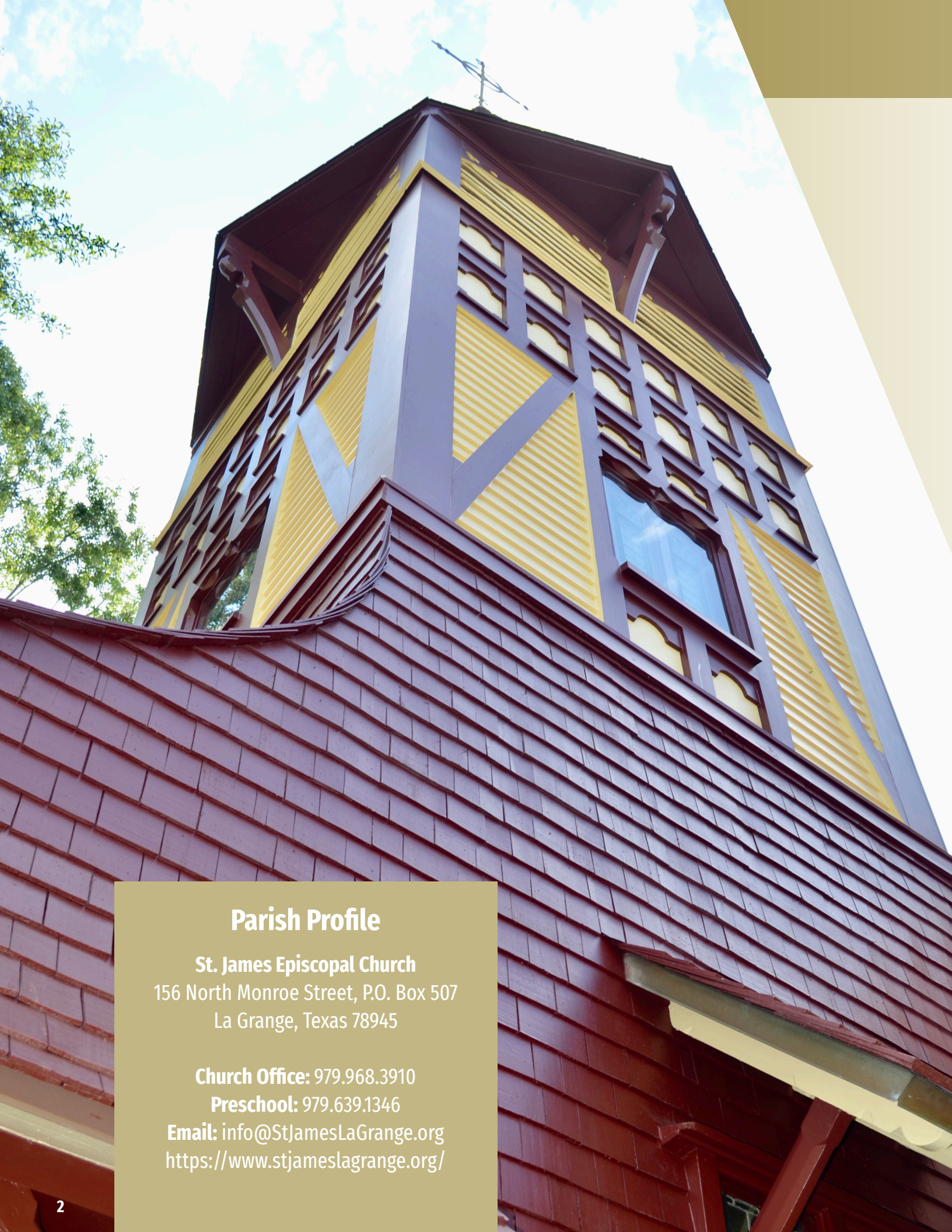




St. James Episcopal Church

St. James 101: An Introduction to the Episcopal Church in La Grange, Texas





Parish Profile

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St. James Episcopal Church

St. James 101: An Introduction to the Episcopal Church in La Grange, Texas

PART ONE: A ST. JAMES WEEKEND

Friday morning



When the doors at Second Chance open on Friday mornings, more than 100 people waiting in line celebrate...and shop.

Lil calls the volunteers together at about 8:45 am, fifteen minutes before the Second Chance Emporium opens. Ten churches take turns staffing Second Chance, a non-profit retail store on the south side of La Grange. The old store was destroyed in the floods of Hurricane Harvey. The new store covers 20,000 square feet, so it usually takes two churches to roust enough volunteers. St. James Episcopal teams up with friends at First Presbyterian.



Before Second Chance Emporium opens, St. James and First Presbyterian workers gather for instructions and a prayer. The second-hand store is operated by ten area churches and all "profits" go to local social service groups.

W. O. Wood says a prayer. W. O. is a retired railroad engineer (and thus always in overalls) and a Presbyterian. He is a little gimpy this week after a run-in with a cow. (W.O. lost.) He takes off his hat as we circle and he prays for the customers, the staff, the volunteers, and the good work that proceeds from Second Chance to area non-profits make possible.

The doors open at 9. Over 100 people are in line. They flood in. The race is on. Over the next six, non-stop hours, Second Chance will sell about \$17,000 in dollar shirts, quarter socks, knick-knacks, furniture, wheel chairs and George Strait CDs.



Friday Afternoon

The St. James Men's Club's Holy Smokers are supposed to begin trimming, washing and seasoning just over 400 chicken halves at 1 pm, but the work always begins around 12:30. (If you are on time in Fayette County, you're late.) For each monthly sale, each benefitting a local charity, a dozen or more Smokers will clean and spice the chicken, split wood for the next day's fires and load the smokestack tower used to make the coals. Nearby are three large barbecue pits. Teachers bring a young group, all holding hands, from the St. James Pre-School to survey all the action. We hoist the children so they can peer into the dark pits. The seasoned chicken is packed back into two large refrigerators until Saturday morning, allowing the spices to do their magic. Second Chance closes at 3 pm.



Once a month, the St. James Men's Club smokes chicken and sausage. The line of cars waiting for "Episcopal chicken" can go around the block.



St. James has a fully accredited pre-school. Sometimes the children come out to see what the Smokers are doing.



Sometimes there will be a guitar at Supper Club, other times, an accordion.

Friday Night

Supper Club this month is being held in a pasture on a member's ranch south of La Grange. We set up next to a tank (Texan for "pond") as cattle look on in brown-eyed bemusement. The hosts of the Supper Club usually provide a main course – BBQ sometimes, gumbo near Mardi Gras, a soup supper for Epiphany, when we burn the Christmas greens. Everyone else fills in around the edges. If a measure of a good community is the quantity and quality of offerings at a pitch-in meal, then St. James ranks in the top ten percent.

We set up lawn chairs or sit on truck tailgates. The food comes out. So does a guitar or two. Sometimes an accordion. The cows watch a picnic on the Blackland Prairie of Central Texas as the sun sets.



A plain air Supper Club.



Once a month, St. James holds Supper Club. Last summer, the pitch-in dinner was held in a pasture south of La Grange.

Saturday Morning

The Smokers get back to the church a little before 5 am. The first order of business is starting the fire to make the coals that are then spread in the bottom of the huge pits. Workers load the pits with chicken and sausage. The Smokers use long-handled shovels to scoop coals into the pits and the temperature is brought to a steady 250 degrees. The pits are closed and most of the Smokers head to a local restaurant for huevos rancheros.

When the wind is just right, most of La Grange smells the burning oak and knows the Smokers are at work. Smoke is better advertising than a spot on the radio.

The Presbyterians and the Episcopalians are back at Second Chance at 8 to put out more merchandize and tidy up for the 9 o'clock opening.

About 9:30 the Episcopal Church Women arrive at the Smokers' locale with armfuls of cookies, cakes, pies — even a few containers of delicious pinto beans. They set up a sales tent in the church parking lot so they catch the people driving through to pick up barbecue. Chicken and sausage first, and then dessert, all in one pass through the church parking lot!



The Smokers scatter hot coals in the bottom of the pits to bring the temperature to a steady 250 degrees.



Each chicken cook benefits a local non-profit. This month, the donation went to the county's very active Habitat for Humanity.

About this time, members of the Altar Guild come to the church to prepare the sanctuary for Sunday's services. They arrange flowers, fill candles with oil and deck the altar with clean linens.

By 10 am, the cars begin to line up for "Episcopal chicken." The cook is always to benefit a local non-profit. This week, proceeds from the sale will go to the local Habitat for Humanity. Habitat volunteers show up to help take orders and to hand out information about their group. Smokers catch up with the latest Habitat projects. By 10:30 am, the chicken and sausage are ready and the line of cars grows 15 deep.

The sales of sausage, chicken and buttermilk pie are fast and furious until a little after noon. (Yes, we sell 416 halves of chicken and 160 rings of sausage in about 90 minutes.) The Smokers and the ECW pack away their tents. Some Smokers do the job of explaining to disappointed customers that there's no more smoked meat.

Saturdays are not as busy as Fridays at Second Chance. This is a day for families to come in to buy good (but inexpensive) school clothes or things for a new baby. There are still times when



The Episcopal Church Women hold a bake sale on the same day as the chicken and sausage sale.

the checkout line grows and all five cash registers are working. The doors close at 3. In 12 hours of sales, Second Chance will collect \$25,000 for the weekend. "Profits" from Second Chance go to local social service groups. In September, the local hospital needed \$10,000 to buy three breathing machines for COVID patients. The money was available that week.

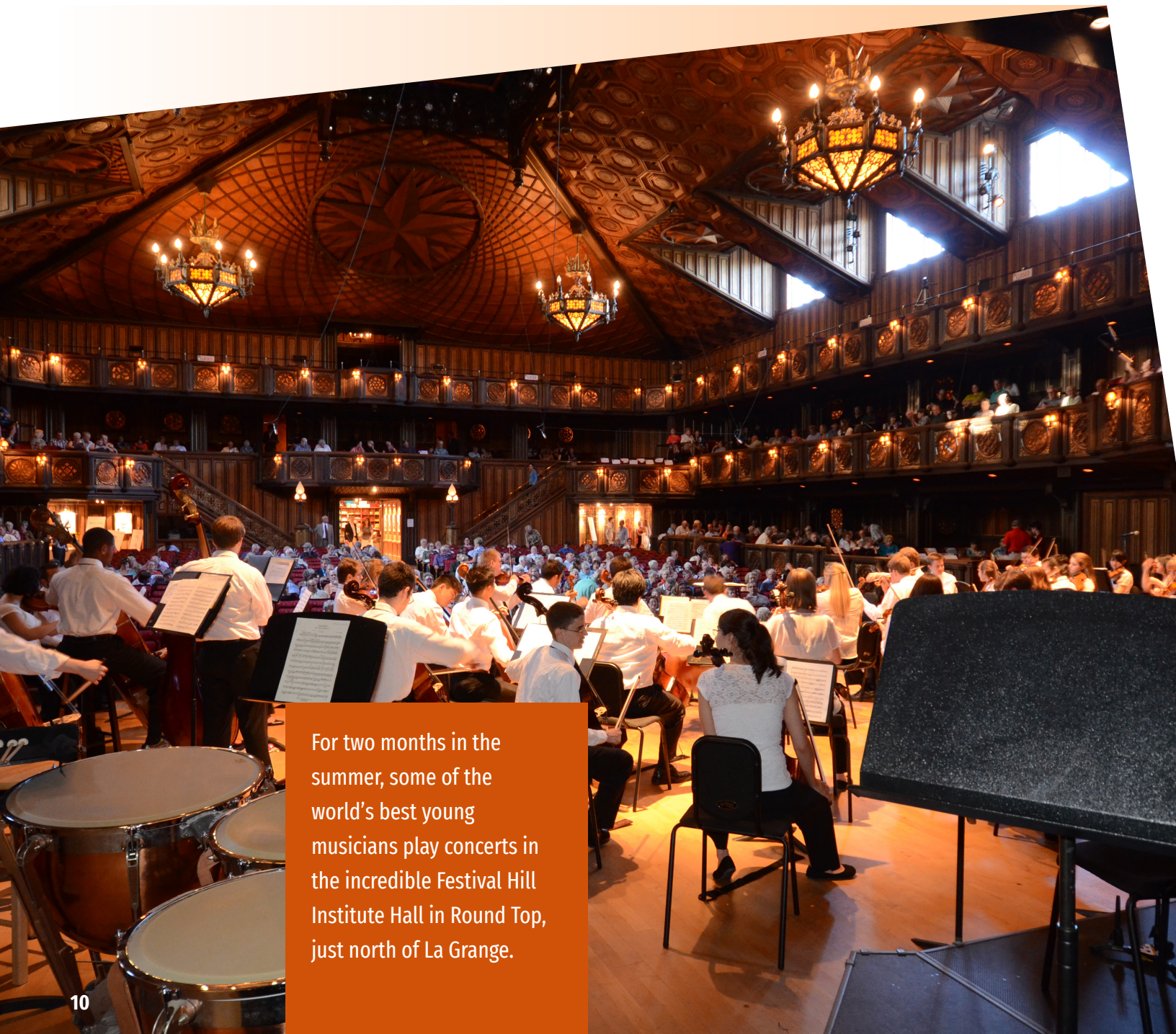


Once a year the Smokers cook turkeys for the Family Crisis Center. Brown and crispy on the outside, juicy on the inside.

Saturday Night

No church activities. Everyone is free to go to Festival Hill in Round Top to hear the full orchestra of some of the best young musicians in the world. They play in a hall built by local carpenters that is a miracle of wood working.

Tonight's concert features selections from Faure, Mozart and Mendelssohn. Shakespeare at Winedale is showcasing *As You Like It*. Ray Wylie Hubbard is at the Bugle Boy. Or, staying home is good.



For two months in the summer, some of the world's best young musicians play concerts in the incredible Festival Hill Institute Hall in Round Top, just north of La Grange.



The St. James choir practices before the 10:30 service.

Sunday Morning

Ushers arrive before the 8 am Rite One service. Brad rings the 1892 bell and the Rite One service begins. Afterwards, there are coffee, donuts and some especially devilish apple fritters. In one of the new conference rooms, the pastor leads a Bible study.

The choir arrives to begin practice at 9:30. There is an afternoon practice during the week, when choir members and director Don Kirby prepare books of music. This Sunday there is a piece by John Rutter, a rolling gospel number by Mark Hayes and a shape note hymn, along with Episcopal standards. All need work and the choir gets to it.

The Altar Guild prepares for the Eucharist at the 10:30 Rite Two service. The bell gets another workout. Afterwards, more food, coffee and visiting.



The Altar Guild at work.



The church's 1892 bell rings every Sunday morning.

Sunday Afternoon

This Sunday is “choir camp.” Choir members bring food for a big lunch and then a longer than usual practice to go over anthems for the coming month or two. Choir members mop up the last bit of spice cake and grab their choir books. Director Don Kirby introduces music for the next two months: a Czech folk song, spirituals, something in plainsong and the Native American classic The Dakota Hymn. The next music selection is always a surprise.

The music doesn't stop with church. There are over 100 church picnics in Texas featuring Czech polkas and waltzes. This week, the picnic and dance (with three bands) are at St. Mary's in High Hill, one of the remarkable “painted churches” of Fayette County.



Texas churches with Czech or German immigrant origins hold 100 picnics and dances every summer. Many are in Fayette County. This is the dance floor at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Praha.



People in Fayette County love to dance.

Monday Morning – a New Week

This week is St. James' turn to staff the AMEN food pantry. Volunteers arrive at 8:30 to put food on the shelves and package fresh vegetables and meat for families. Again, this service is a cooperative effort among Fayette County churches. At 9, families come in and St. James church members take clients through the newly refurbished food pantry. AMEN is open until noon and it is busy all morning.



Arriving for school.

Our Vision, Mission And Values

MISSION

To be a welcoming faith-based community where God's presence is felt and from which we are sent to proclaim Christ's love and to serve others.

VISION

To be the face of Christ to all we encounter, to share God's love with all people, and to honor our traditions and heritage as we are united by the common ground of our faith into a beloved community together.

VALUES

Spiritual Growth

Unceasing desire to know God

We rely on prayerful reflection, study, and theological balance, being ever mindful of our needs and of those in different circumstances.

Community Service/Outreach

Unceasing commitment to make a difference in the lives of God's people

We feed our community spiritually, emotionally, and physically with ministries and programs that strengthen our relationship with God and each other.

Meaningful Worship

Unceasing commitment to bring us into God's presence

We are engaged, encouraged, and inspired by a worship service steeped in Episcopal tradition.

Welcoming Church Family

Unceasing commitment to reflect God's love in hospitality

We are part of God's family, serving each other and all of God's people with a spirit of love, generosity, inclusiveness, and compassion.



Fayette County: Where We Live

The year following the Texas Revolution in 1836, early settlers named their new county Fayette to honor of the Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette. The county seat would be La Grange, the name of Lafayette's wife's chateau in north-central France. But there was and is nothing remotely French about this prairie land that lies between Austin and Houston. The character of the county was shaped more by people from an area far to the east of Paris.

Before any Europeans, the Tonkawa Indians and other tribes frequented this area. The Colorado River crossing north of La Grange was a hub for Native American traders. Then White settlers arrived, adventurers and those from the Old

South with their African slaves. They found high fields of waving native grasses. Germans moved in after 1848, along with Czech-speakers, largely from three towns in Moravia.

The new German and Moravian residents were not slave owners and when the ballot on secession was held a narrow majority voted to stick with the union. Fayette County was one of only 18 Texas counties to vote against secession.

The Germans and Czechs brought their penchant for clubs and organizations with them. They formed shooting clubs, fraternal organizations, brass bands and singing groups, religious associations and literary societies. A Methodist

Casino Hall

The Germans and Czechs who settled here built community meeting places in every settlement. This is the Casino Hall in La Grange in 1886. It has been restored by the city and is still used as a meeting place.



PART TWO: ORIGINS

missionary started a college here in 1840, one of the first in the state. (Only a historical marker and College Road remain.) Most communities in Fayette County have a central building, constructed by immigrants, that still serves as a meeting place and dance hall. These people loved their music and their dances. There are residents who grew up speaking Czech or German, only learning English when they went to school. In 2020, 28% of Fayette County residents claimed German ancestry (compared to 8% in Texas as a whole) and 14% noted Czech ancestry (compared with less than 1% for all of Texas), making Fayette the most heavily Czech county in the state.

After the Civil War, large farms broke into smaller ones and cotton, sugar cane and corn were

replaced with cattle and dairy cows. By 1987, Fayette County was home to 2,235 milk cows and 110,511 head of cattle. The county's population peaked in 1900 at 36,542, dropping to 17,650 in 1970 and settling at 24,554 in the latest Census.

The county is 70 percent White, 22.5 percent Hispanic, 6.1 percent African American and one percent Asian. The median age here was 47 in 2019, seven years older than the national median. In terms of income, the county resembles the state, with the most common household range between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year. When compared with the state, Fayette County has markedly fewer of the highest income families and a couple of percentage points more of the poorest, which disproportionately includes Black and, to a

Every town had a band.





This is downtown La Grange nearly 125 years ago.

lesser extent, Latino families. A striking feature, no doubt linked to the retired and relatively older population, is that more than half the family income in the county derives from investments, rather than employment. And in this obviously rural area of beautiful fields, pastures and still plentiful livestock, only about 250 people make their primary living from farming or ranching. The predominant occupations are managerial/professional staff and sales/office workers.

As for politics.....well, it's America. The county was long singularly Democratic, in the "yellow dog" tradition that would support a canine before a Republican. Fayette County was part of Lyndon B. Johnson's old congressional district. Those allegiances changed, however, and the county now consistently votes (as in 80 percent)

Republican. But local politics are never simple. La Grange recently elected a Black woman as its mayor, with non-partisan and multi-racial support. One of the leaders of the county Republican Party has also begun a formal program to encourage conversations between the increasingly polarized party faithful. At that first Braver Angels meeting, 13 attendees – Democrats and Republicans – were St. James members.

Two more things: First, if you are walking down the street in La Grange and the driver of a car passing by waves, don't worry. There's nothing wrong. It's La Grange. We wave. Finally, you *have* heard ZZ Top's rock anthem "La Grange." Well, this is the place.

St. James Episcopal Church: A Brief History



Georgiana Shropshire deeded land in La Grange for an Episcopal Church in 1868.

The Methodists opened a Fayette County church in 1838, the Baptists in 1839, the Presbyterians in 1841 and in 1848 Henry N. Pierce was appointed an Episcopal missionary in La Grange. Bishop G. W. Freeman visited La Grange that year, returning in 1854 to conduct the first confirmation.

The history of St. James has been no smooth march to triumph. In 1868, Georgiana Shropshire deeded land for a future church. This was the year after a yellow fever epidemic had killed her husband, Benjamin, and one fifth of the members of St. James. Planning for the church we see today began in 1883. (See the building's history below.) And then decline.

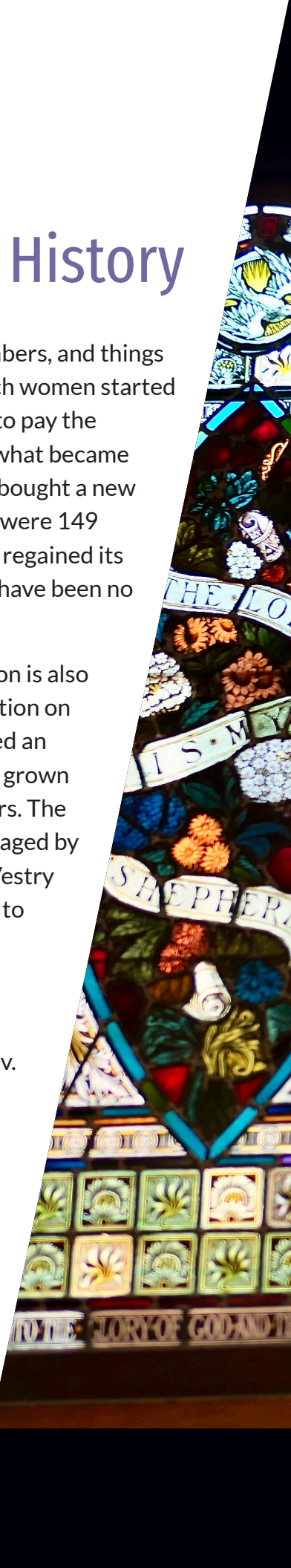
The church was mostly vacant from 1901 to 1925. A bishop would come by once a year to hold services. When Deacon J. Cross Gray tried to revive the church in 1917, he literally found bats in the belfry – and a leaky roof and filthy carpet. Deacon Gray turned Presbyterian. In 1921, St. James had nine members. It would remain a mission church for the next 55 years.

We at St. James have heard of these fallow decades when grass grew up through the floor of the sanctuary. Still a “missionary” church, St. James built a parish hall in the mid-1950s. There were only 12 active members in 1958.

By 1963, there were 24 members, and things were looking up. Three church women started a thrift store to raise money to pay the bills. It was the beginning of what became Second Chance. The women bought a new church organ. In 1978, there were 149 communicants and St. James regained its status as a parish. And there have been no lulls since.

The church's financial situation is also stable. (See financial information on Page 36.) Parishioners created an endowment in 1985 that has grown to well over one million dollars. The St. James Endowment is managed by a committee elected by the Vestry and makes regular payments to the church.

A diverse and distinguished group of rectors have served at St. James since '78. The Rev. David Puckett (1980 to '85) went on to serve as dean of St. John's Cathedral in Albuquerque. And The Rt. Rev. Dena Harrison, who served St. James from 1992 to '97, became the first female Bishop elected and consecrated in Texas.






The three windows on the lower south transept of the church were donated by Benjamin and Georgiana Shropshire's children in 1885. We believe they were made by Charles Booth, an Englishman who made the windows for what is now the Jefferson Market Library in New York City. The ship carrying the windows from London struck an iceberg.

The Church Building

“At an important architecture convention in Austin a distinguished speaker was asked, ‘If you could see only one building in Texas what would it be?’ He replied, ‘Well, I would want to see one big one and one small one: the Texas State Capitol and the Episcopal Church in La Grange!’”

– Rt. Rev. Dena Harrison

In 1883 Rev. W. G. W. Smith, St. James first full-time rector, retained R.M. Upjohn to design a building for St. James. The architect and his father, Richard Upjohn, were renowned for their dedication to a “high church” style. The Upjohn firm had designed several large urban churches: Trinity, Ascension, and Calvary in New York City, Christ Episcopal in Raleigh, St. Paul’s Cathedral in Buffalo, and St. Mark’s in San Antonio. By mid-19th century, they were specializing in a church style that came to be known as “Carpenter Gothic.” Historian Lawrence Wodehouse cites the key elements of Carpenter Gothic as “steep roofs, board and batten walls, and narrow pointed



The church was designed by R. M. Upjohn of New York. The style is “Carpenter Gothic.”



Bishop Kai Ryan blessed the restored St. James belltower in 2019.

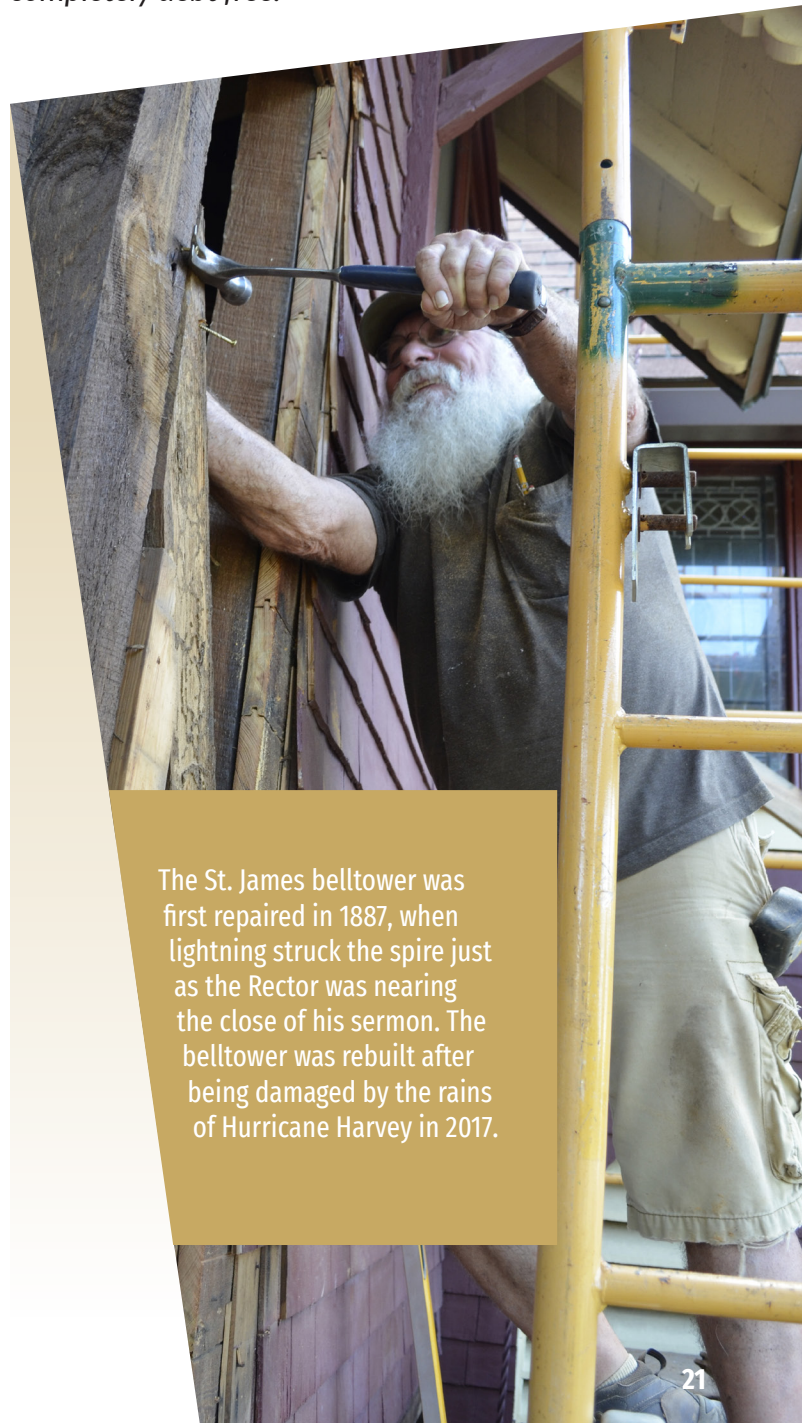
windows, suited to the skills and materials of local builders.”

The design for St. James was original, the brainchild of R.M. Upjohn rather than a knockoff based on his father’s published drawings. But it too could be described as Carpenter Gothic in its simplicity: its steep roof, board and batten construction, the dominant ribs and beams of the sanctuary, and its abundant stained glass.

St. James added a parish hall in the 1950s and in 2018 the church embarked on a project to expand the pre-school and parish hall and to add some rooms for small group meetings. Members pledged \$675,000 to the \$1.2 million project and construction began on a plan drawn by Heimsath Architects of Austin. The

Heimsath group was chosen in part because it had built and remodeled many churches, including the Rothko Chapel in Houston, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Austin, Christ Church in Temple, and Holy Spirit Episcopal Church in Waco. Construction began in May 2020 and was blessed and dedicated by Bishop Kathryn M. Ryan on December 13, 2020. All the buildings on St. James’ campus now comprise 6,891 square feet. The sanctuary and sacristy are 2,200 square feet.

By March, 2022, the construction loan for the addition had been paid off and St. James was *completely debt free*.



The St. James belltower was first repaired in 1887, when lightning struck the spire just as the Rector was nearing the close of his sermon. The belltower was rebuilt after being damaged by the rains of Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

PART THREE: WHAT WE DO/FAITH IN ACTION

There was a dinner for volunteers who had come to La Grange to help the town deal with floods spawned by Hurricane Harvey. The storm had dumped nearly 30 inches of rain on Central Texas. The Colorado River, which runs through La Grange, flooded and destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses.

A representative of Samaritan's Purse was at that gathering and he listened to a local volunteer explain how the town had dealt with the disaster. Most recently, the La Grange volunteer explained, 17 churches had joined forces to serve two hot meals a week to anyone affected by the storm (which, of course, meant everybody in town). The meals would be served for months.

As the story goes, the Samaritan's Purse representative listened and asked if he had heard correctly: 17 churches in a single town cooperated to serve meals to all comers? Yes, said the volunteer. He excused himself, saying he had to make a call. Minutes later he returned and said



Seventeen churches cooked dinners twice a week for three months for flood victims. This was one of St. James' nights

that Samaritan's Purse was ready to commit three million dollars to help build houses in La Grange.

That was in late 2017. Today, there are 21 houses at the Hope Hill development and dozens of empty lots ready for more homes, built with the help of Samaritan's Purse, local volunteers — and the secret sauce of cooperation.

In all we do, we realize faith through community. We work together in the church and with others in our county. Perhaps this communal way of doing things is simply in the air, a gift from the people who came to this area with their dance halls, fraternal organizations, shooting clubs and religious societies. Or maybe we've just learned that in a small town nothing gets done unless we do it together.



Hurricane Harvey destroyed hundreds of homes in La Grange in 2017. The response by area churches was to work together.



La Grange churches organized flood relief after Hurricane Harvey.

Second Chance Emporium

Second Chance Emporium has given more than \$3 million to local non-profit social service agencies. That's a long way from the store's humble beginnings as a second-hand shop started by parishioners at St. James Episcopal Church in the 1940s as a way to keep the doors open. In the 1990s, Rev. Dena Harrison had the notion to expand the second-hand shop beyond St. James and to use the proceeds to help families lacking food and clothing. To succeed, however, the enterprise needed help. Rev. Harrison asked other churches if they wanted to join the effort.

They all agreed. The group found a building, but didn't have the cash to open. A giant "garage sale" was held at the county fairgrounds to fill an empty bank account. One minister put in the air conditioning at the store. A local company painted a sign. "All the congregations really pitched in," Harrison recalled recently. Even the name was an ecumenical exercise. A Baptist preacher came up with "Second Chance." Harrison added "Emporium." The store opened in April 1996 in an

old building near the river. Ten churches agreed to manage and operate the shop jointly.

The old store was destroyed by floodwaters during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. A new and much larger building was constructed and opened in 2019. Fayette County residents donate their used clothes, furniture, books and kitchen appliances. Families looking to clothe kids for school, outfit a kitchen or find a toy for an active youngster can discover the best deals in town.



St. James members take their turn managing Second Chance Emporium, the town's non-profit thrift store.

Growing Faith

St. James currently (late 2021) has two Bible studies – one led by the Rector on Sunday morning and a Zoom meeting during the week led by those attending. Prior to COVID, however, there was much more activity. Church members have shown an eagerness to expand and explore their knowledge and depth of faith.

In February of 2019, three dozen people joined a church-wide retreat at Camp Allen. St. James members asked a retired Presbyterian minister to conduct a lecture series on Celtic Christianity. Parishioner Doc Ayres, founder of the University of Texas program Shakespeare at Winedale, held a session on Christianity and Shakespeare that filled the parish hall. Several members met for weekly meditation sessions. For several years there was a monthly book club. St. James provided “ashes to go” on Ash Wednesday and visited the local animal shelter for a Blessing of the Animals. The ECW and Vestry hold regular retreats. A St. James member recently



A traditional ofrenda in the parish hall

finished a three-year program of study and was commissioned as a Spiritual Director. And the church formed a committee to help guide a young man who wished to enter seminary. He has graduated from the Virginia Theological Seminary and has taken his first job with a parish in Fort Worth. He visited St. James on his way to his new assignment.

One Día de Muertos, we built a traditional *ofrenda* in the parish hall, with pictures of deceased family and church members. People took turns remembering their loved ones.

Men's Club (AKA Holy Smokers)

The Holy Smokers began in 2005 when men at the church cooked chicken for a fundraiser. Initially, the Men's Club had to use barbecue pits at other churches. The club complained about not having its own spot to cook, so congregant Pinky Wilson told the men to quit griping and buy a pit. She would pay for it. The first cooking station was named Pinky's Pit.

The Smokers now have three pits where they cook chicken and sausage the second Saturday of every month. Profits from the sale are donated to a local charity. One month it might be Serenity Star (a nearby drug rehabilitation facility), a local food pantry or the hospital. The club meets once a month. There are usually 30-35 men who attend. A speaker comes from the non-profit of the month and the guys decide who will be the next beneficiary of the holy smoke.

In November, the Smokers fill the pits with 100 turkeys. They cook all day. Around 6 p.m., trucks from the Family Crisis Center in nearby Bastrop arrive and the smoked turkeys are driven off to families across four counties.



St. James Pre-School is a major part of life at the church.

St. James Pre-School

St. James is never empty — and rarely quiet — during the week because it is headquarters for a licensed preschool with 36 children on two church campuses.

St. James offers a Christian environment that meets the diverse educational, spiritual, and social needs of young people. The staff (two full-time directors and seven part-time teachers and helpers) works to build a strong Christian and academic foundation for preschool age children in a nurturing, family-oriented environment. The school's focus is getting students ready for Kindergarten. The rector is president of the school's board of directors. Children attend "Big Chapel" once a week in the sanctuary, which is led by the rector. The operating budget this year (2023-24) is \$152,000. The school began as a parents-day-out program in 2000. It became a licensed preschool in August 2001. The program proved popular and the school kept adding children, days and hours. In the fall of 2016, the preschool began offering a full day (8 a.m.-3 p.m.) program in addition to the existing

half-day (8 a.m.-noon) program five days a week. The school board's decision to begin offering scholarships in 2015 brought greater diversity to the pre-school student body and widened the school's service to the community. Last year, the school gave over \$14,000 in scholarships — and awarded its first ever college scholarship to a high school senior who attended St. James as a pre-schooler.

Renovation of the classroom building was completed in 2020. The preschool at St. James has a capacity of 18 students: two classrooms with nine children and a teacher in each room. This is an all-day program. The other 18 students are located at a satellite campus at the First Presbyterian Church, called the First Light Campus.

First Light provides a half-day program and the parents-day-out component that remains popular with young parents. This expansion was planned in a joint effort between the school board, members of both congregations, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church and the rector of St. James. This is another example of the cooperative spirit among churches in Fayette County.



The school has an off-street drop-off for students and parents, part of the \$1.2 million construction project finished in 2020.

PART THREE: WHAT WE DO/FAITH IN ACTION

AMEN

Thirteen Fayette County churches work together to operate the AMEN Food Pantry in La Grange. They have done this for the past 31 years. In 2020, 3,741 households (10,537 individuals) received food from AMEN. The pantry received 36,000 pounds of food donated through the Central Texas Food Bank and local groceries. AMEN also receives a monthly cash donation from Second Chance.



A St. James member painted a “food frieze” in the waiting room of the AMEN food pantry.

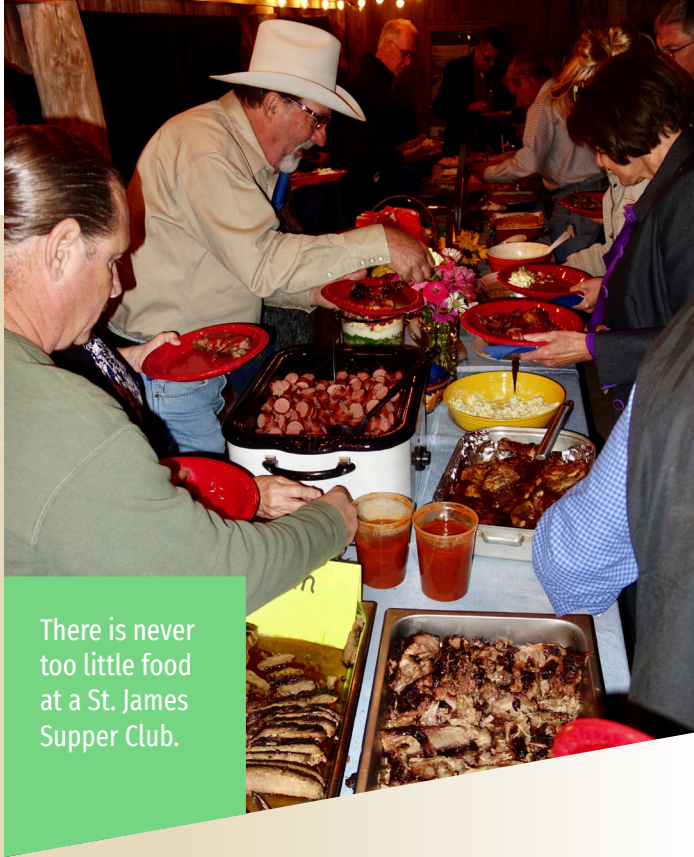
When AMEN moved into a new building, Suzanne, a St. James parishioner, painted a bright “food frieze” in the new waiting room, complete with cows, mice, cheese and lettuce.

Choir

Music is important to St. James and has been for decades. The 10:30 service is filled with hymns, spirituals and church music from other countries. The choir is led by Director Don Kirby, a Baptist by upbringing who has a Masters in music conducting from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Having Don as director counts as a “twofer,” since Mary Kirby has a Masters in voice from SWBT and sings a wonderful soprano. On the organ and piano is Mary Ann Hatfield, a renowned local musician who also accompanies choral groups at nearby Blinn College.

Anyone can join the choir. Show up for practice and we will get you music and a robe. A committee led by the rector chooses what music will be played, but the variety is boundless. This week, the choir practiced some Mozart, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” and a piece in Spanish.





There is never too little food at a St. James Supper Club.

Supper Club

Every month, St. James has a family supper. The hosts provide the main dish and the 60 or so attendees bring sides, appetizers and desserts. The dinners are held at a private home (backyard or porch), one of the fraternal halls dotted around the county or even a pasture. There is always way too much food – and often a song or two.

Episcopal Church Women/Daughters of the King

Episcopal Church Women includes all the women of the church. The St. James ECW has a bake sale the one Saturday a month the Smokers hawk their chicken, but that is just the beginnings of what they do. For instance, recently the ECW met in nearby Flatonia at a restored movie theater. Popcorn, ice cream and Elvis for everyone!

The ECW makes up Easter baskets for the Family Crisis Center and distributes trick-or-treat candy and Valentine's cards to local nursing homes and care facilities. The group gives scholarships to

graduating seniors and to preschool children. When the church needs a reception for a baptism, wedding or confirmation, the ECW prepares the table. The ECW honors service members on Veterans' Day with a photo display of local vets and a breakfast in the Parish Hall. And every Thanksgiving, ECW members bake 160 dozen (that's 1,920) cookies to go with the Holy Smoker turkeys given to the Family Crisis Center.

The Mother Theresa Chapter of the Daughters of the King is a small but vital part of the St. James ministry and culture. The seven women who comprise the chapter are "prayer warriors" for the clergy and congregation, praying for all needs, known and unknown, on a daily basis. The Chapter hosts bi-monthly meetings open to all women.

The Chapter also supports individual community activities and church ministries. For example, the DOK helped with a grant application to the Order's Self Denial Fund that benefitted a faith-based orphanage and school in Haiti. (One of the school's founders is a local cardiologist who reached out to our Chapter President.) In November the DOK is hosting a workshop for the congregation on preparing for Advent, based on the church's stewardship campaign's focus on giving from the heart.



One of the ECW's outings was to a restored movie theater in Flatonia. Elvis and popcorn for everyone!

PART THREE: WHAT WE DO/FAITH IN ACTION

Altar Guild/LEM/Ushers

About ten faithful women prepare the sanctuary for two services each Sunday, as well as for special worship during Advent and Lent. Everything in the sacristy and chancel is in their charge to maintain and arrange: the linens, candles, flower, Bible and printed readings. Then they ready the sanctuary for worshipers at each service.

Members of the Altar Guild are busy. They come and go throughout the week, always with a purpose. Before Christmas, they fill the



We cut our cedar Christmas tree at a member's ranch.

church with greens. (We always chop our own tree at a member's ranch and haul it to town in the back of a pickup.) Before Palm Sunday, the Guild organizes a mass cross-making session. And the Guild brings out pail after pail of water and mountains of towels for the annual foot-washing service.

Church members are active in the Sunday service. We have a dedicated group of Lay Eucharistic Ministers to help with communion. Ushers greet everyone coming into the sanctuary and members take turns reading the lessons and prayers of the people.

Ecumenical Fayette

There is an active ministerial alliance in La Grange but the structure of ecumenism here has been built on the things we do together. AMEN and Second Chance are governed by boards with representatives from member churches. Often, volunteers at AMEN and Second Chance come from two or more churches. If a church needs extra workers one week, the call goes out to other churches for volunteers. We work together, so we really know each other. We're friends.





La Grange churches organized a Posada. The pilgrims marched in front of St. James.

The community falls back on this way of doing things during emergencies. While the floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey were still rising, a meeting was held at the St. James parish hall to organize the community’s response to the disaster. We built on the organizations we had. The Second Chance building was under 9 feet of water, so a member of the Methodist Church offered a huge warehouse to stock clothing and supplies. The Church of Christ turned its sanctuary into a storage locker. Second Baptist (now Crossroads) began housing people flooded out of their homes.



Flooded families came to the relief center organized by La Grange churches to get everything from Pampers to sports jackets.

This kind of cooperation is common. Language classes (English and Spanish) begun by members of St. James were housed by the Methodists, the Lutherans and the Presbyterians. When the St. James sanctuary was closed for repairs to the belltower, the Lutherans gave us a home. While new pre-school classrooms were being constructed, the school moved to the First Presbyterian Church. There is a joint Thanksgiving service and the Lutheran Youth Organization in La Grange is now supported by several local churches, including St. James.



The Posada ended with a tamale dinner.

This is not to say we have created a paradise. The racial divisions found in the rest of the country exist here, too. But those lines can waver. The Holy Smokers cooked for a nearby AME church – and then members quadrupled the donation. And before COVID struck, all churches in La Grange cooperated in holding a Posada. We sang and marched with two burros from Hispanic church to White church to Black church, ending with a meal of tamales and beans at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. And, yes, one of the stops was at St. James.

PART THREE: WHAT WE DO/FAITH IN ACTION

Work Outside the Church

St. James members are engaged in a number of community efforts that don't begin at the church. Two members have programs for at-risk children using their herd of mini-horses. <http://www.minihorsehelpers.org/index.html> Others have collected old computers, installed new programs and given them to students, English-learners and non-profits. <https://www.lgcomputers4all.org/> The county animal shelter receives support from across the community. St. James members can be seen working with the Texas Women's League, St. Marks Hospital, the Gardenia Janssen Animal Shelter, Festival Hill Institute, The Smithville Public Library, Braver Angels and both political parties.



St. James members helped start a program to refurbish old computers and then give them to families that needed to get online, study English and finish homework.



The Shiner Hobo Band plays at one of the scores of church picnics held each summer in and around Fayette County.

Picnics, Polka and Painted Churches

Each summer, some 100 churches founded by Czech settlers will hold picnics. Fayette County is at the center of this annual renewal of friendship,





the first Czech settlers. You can't explain the Pražská Pout, held each year by the parish in Praha, south of La Grange, with its 5,000 meals, three bands and hundreds of people singing along in Czech. You just have to go. It is fitting that the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center is here in La Grange. <http://www.czechtexas.org/>

Many of these picnics are held at the county's famed "painted churches." The sanctuaries of these churches are hand painted in vibrant colors and intricate patterns. Again, you have to see them for yourself.

kinship, faith and music. Dinner will likely be fried chicken, beef stew, sauerkraut, green beans, pickles and kolaches. People dance to waltzes, polkas and two-steps, played by bands that trace their traditions, music and instruments back to



La Grange is home to the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center. Here, Miss Texas Czech watches a "pig plop" at one of the Center's outdoor celebrations.



Fayette County is home of many "painted churches." This is the inside of St. Mary Catholic Church in High Hill.

PART THREE: WHAT WE DO/FAITH IN ACTION

Health and Education

La Grange is home to a 100,000 square foot hospital, built in 2005. St. Mark's Hospital is now undergoing reorganization as a Rural Emergency Hospital..

Fayette County has five different school districts. We have avoided the consolidation wave that has robbed many rural communities of their schools and identities.

Blinn College in Brenham has a campus in Schulenburg, a 20-minute drive south of La Grange. Blinn professors teach dual-credit courses at La Grange High School. Many students take their first two years of college at Blinn before transferring to Texas A&M University or the University of Texas. A longtime faculty member of Blinn/Schulenburg's English department — and parishioner of St. James — initiated a popular Emerging Writers Contest to further inspire students. <https://www.blinn.edu/schulenburg/index.html>

Shostakovich, Shakespeare and the Chubby Knuckle Choir

In 1970 concert pianist James Dick moved to Fayette County and, over the next 50 years, created a miracle of classical music. Each summer, Festival Hill brings the world's best young musicians to Round Top to practice and perform. In June and July, they put on over 30 concerts.

The concert hall was built by local carpenters and is a masterpiece in wood. Besides the active concert schedule in the summer, Festival Hill

hosts cultural events throughout the year. <https://festivalhill.org/>

The same year James Dick moved on to 200 acres near Round Top, the University of Texas' James B. (Doc) Ayres opened Shakespeare at Winedale, a two-month summer program for students to study and perform plays. Doc Ayres is a parishioner at St. James. <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/winedale/Programs/Camp-Shakespeare/camp-overview.php>

Seventeen years ago, an old Army barracks on the edge of La Grange was turned into a "listening room." Over these past years, singer songwriters from Austin and Houston have made regular stops at The Bugle Boy, including Ray Wylie Hubbard, Gretchen Peters and, yes, the Chubby Knuckle Choir. The Bugle Boy is a non-profit that has worked with military veterans who have a song to sing and sends musicians to nursing homes and to Hospice patients. <https://thebugleboy.org/>

Fayette also has a vital and active community theater. This past summer the theater put on a production of The Jungle Book with over 50 children in the cast. The latest: an outdoor performance of Of Mice and Men. <https://www.fayettecountycommunitytheatre.com/>



Fayette County Community Theatre produces several plays a year. In 2021, over 50 children were in the cast of The Jungle Book.

PART FOUR: ST. JAMES AND ITS RECTOR

What are the qualities we're looking for in the next rector? That's easy: Everything, and don't spare the contradictions.



St. James needs an enthusiastic team leader; a priest who draws us into worship and inspires us from the pulpit; a rector who delights in leading Bible study; a minister who knows when to prod change and when to preserve what we have

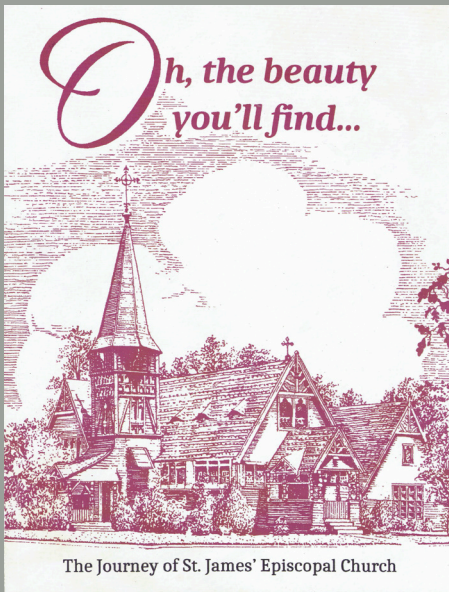
worked for and what we have inherited; a pastor to shepherd us through the good times and the sad; an administrator with a keen sense of the management of parish finances and the daily operation and care of the church; a supporter and spiritual guide for our pre-school; a person who involves the staff and the congregation in parish decisions.

Whoever chooses to guide us will be challenged to maintain unity in a fellowship of individuals with diverse opinions on everything from the Bible to the Constitution. (Unlike big-city churches, we are "unsorted.") The position requires empathy, a willingness to listen with compassion, and a sincere desire to find common ground in Christ. Our priest must also be a willing participant in our larger, church-centered community, where the cooperation of our many religious and civic organizations enables us to work for the welfare of all and to celebrate our lives in Christ together.

Finally, we want the help and support of our rector to keep our pews full. In Fayette County, more than a quarter of the population is over 65. We are a county of seniors and also home to a dynamic new generation of young adults who have chosen to stay or have moved here to raise their children in a vibrant small town. Our priest will need to be comfortable with grandparents and toddlers and attractive to parents who may be unfamiliar with our faith.

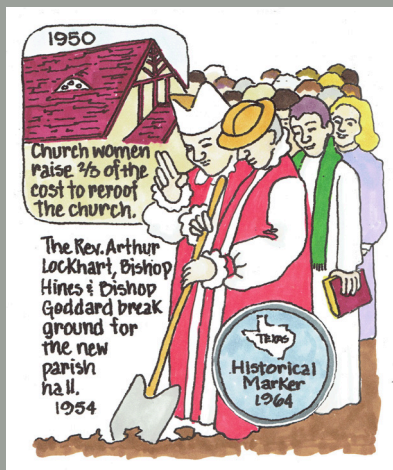
We prize our worship at St. James which has evolved over almost 170 years under the direction of its clergy, many whom were educated at Virginia Theological Seminary or the Seminary of the Southwest. Many of us come from other faith backgrounds and some have joined us having had no religious commitment before coming to St. James. All are drawn by our liturgy and our music.





Oh, the beauty you'll find...

St. James published a 90-page history of the church in 2023. The book tells the St. James story from its founding by some of the earliest Anglo settlers in Texas, through hard times (when weeds grew through the floorboards) to today's vibrant community. The book ends with a ten-page illustrated history of Fayette County and St. James, including the time a future Presiding Bishop (John Hines) came to La Grange to break ground on a new Parish Hall.



Perhaps we are more a church of Marthas than Marys. If this profile has told you anything, it is that we are a church of doers. We are more likely to be in the kitchen with Martha cooking for a Supper Club or for flood victims than in isolated contemplation.

Below, we've listed comments from St. James members who answered an in-house questionnaire, or attended one of four listening sessions. We hope these statements and the contents of this profile give a sense of our people and this place.

What Our Members Say You Should Know:

"Here, people in the congregation, people reach out to you. I need to feel that they are going to include me. I want to participate."

"We have a lot of highly educated members, a lot more chiefs than Indians (as the old expression goes,) a lot more shepherds than sheep. A lot of people with strong ideas about things and a lot of people who have had high managerial or professional positions and experiences."

"The whole spectrum of political thought is found at St. James - and is respected, but not 'preached.'"

"There is a dividing line between the 8 service and the 10:30."

"The social part of this church is more important than the religious part to a great number of our members. It's what brings people here."

"To see everybody at the grocery store is important. After the service, we have another meeting at HEB."

"One thing that struck us when we came here is it was so friendly...The friendliness is overwhelming. You can just feel the love and caring that people have."

"The music is important to us. There is something special about this choir."

"That's what special about this church. The people are involved. They don't just come on Sundays."

"To me, all the stuff being done and all the friendliness of the people. It's all one thing. It all goes together."

What Our Members Want In A New Rector

“Someone who believes in positive social changes and who will actively encourage racial diversity in our parish.”

“An experienced rector, someone who wants to experience the small town atmosphere.”

“I, for one, am having a real struggle with figuring out how to be a Christian and view all of what is going on in our country with a kind heart. And the world, for that matter. Strong emphasis on how to use God’s words and Jesus’ teachings to handle our views on national politics, for example....Good luck on that one.”

“Someone with deep and true faith.”

“Someone who wants to become engaged with this rural community.”

“What I would really like is someone who doesn’t dumb down the sermons. I really like sermons to be challenging and stimulating. With a background of the Bible and the Greek and Hebrew. A scholar.”

“I would like something really spiritual to happen in the service.”

“I’ve been member of churches where pastors want to be popular. And they water down everything and neglect the mission of the church.”

“Deep commitment to Biblical authority and truth.”

“I appreciate sermons that draw from history, literature, philosophy, and a range of theological perspectives. People with seminary backgrounds know that the scripture requires context. Please share that with us.”

“Mission minded – seeking ways to minister (as a congregation and a person) in the community and world.”

“I am looking for strong leadership, and the ability to preach the gospel according to Jesus without fear of repercussions. A willingness to be involved in our larger community is important. I think a sense of humor will be essential.”

“We were drawn because he was so focused on the gospel and the bible and he didn’t stray off into a lot of political stuff. It doesn’t matter what direction. It’s not what we come to church for.”

“I would prefer somebody older. Basically we were a stepping stone....I want a rector that is not wanting to come in and implement a bunch of changes and is trying to move up the food chain. I want somebody who will concentrate on serving the congregation.”

“The whole point is to bring people together, not to emphasize their differences. Some things are purely your personal opinion and they don’t belong here. We’re here to do the right thing, not to get into a disagreement.”

“It doesn’t matter. If they are male or female. If they are the right person.”

“I prefer to have somebody not that long out of seminary, so they are current with what’s happening. I want somebody who is still learning.”

We don’t want politics. They don’t have to get into politics at all. Jesus and the Bible cover everything.”

“I don’t want somebody who is anxious to leave us as soon as possible. They need to be happy being here.”

**To me, all the stuff
being done and all
the friendliness of the
people. It’s all one thing.
It all goes together.**

ST. JAMES' MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL REPORT

MEMBERSHIP:	2011	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022
Membership at year end:	125	166	176	183	182	127
Communicants in Good Standing:	97	166	176	180	179	110
Average Sunday Attendance (ASA):	92	102	100	106	110	79
Easter Attendance:	206	212	211	278	0	143
Christmas Attendance:	-	190	154	155	178	154
Marriages:	0	1	1	0	1	1
Burials:	2	6	1	10	5	6
Baptisms over 16:	0	0	0	1	0	0
Baptisms: Infants through 16:	0	0	1	3	2	3
Confirmations 16 and over:	0	0	2	8	3	0
Confirmations under 16:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Receptions:	0	0	6	3	7	0
Sunday School Enrollment:	9	17	17	18	0	0
Enrollment as % of membership:	7.20%	10.24%	9.66%	9.84%	0.00%	0.00%
Confirmations, Receptions, Adult Baptisms (CRAB):	0	0	8	12	10	0
CRAB as % of ASA:	0.00%	0.00%	8.00%	11.32%	9.09%	0.00%
REVENUE:						
Total Pledge Amount:	\$206,801.00	\$295,423.00	\$316,918.00	\$303,544.00	\$317,640.00	\$280,742.00
Pledging Units:	63	77	75	73	78	61
Average Pledge Amount:	\$3,282.56	\$3,836.66	\$4,225.57	\$4,158.14	\$4,072.31	\$4,602.00
Average Current Diocesan Pledge Amount:	\$3,575.16	\$4,478.46	\$4,654.77	\$4,766.59	\$5,197.25	\$5,353.00
Plate and Pledge:	\$261,891.00	\$392,219.00	\$370,129.00	\$354,837.00	\$330,553.00	\$335,107.00
Total Operating Revenue:	\$274,449.00	\$394,865.00	\$431,884.00	\$431,441.00	\$402,557.00	\$390,107.00
Plate and Pledge as % of Operating Revenue:	95.42%	99.33%	85.70%	82.24%	82.11%	85.90%
Expenses:	\$242,842.00	\$305,784.00	\$340,458.00	\$385,576.00	\$355,060.00	\$371,935.00
Outreach from Operating Revenue:	\$24,866.00	\$24,792.00	\$24,986.00	\$22,596.00	\$22,296.00	\$26,700.00
Outreach as % of Operating Revenue:	9.06%	6.28%	5.79%	5.24%	5.54%	6.84%
Diocesan Assessment:	\$28,396.00	\$20,164.00	\$25,940.00	\$26,838.00	\$29,522.00	\$31,534.00
As % of Operating Revenue:	10.35%	5.11%	6.01%	6.22%	7.33%	8.08%
As % of Plate and Pledge:	10.84%	5.14%	7.01%	7.56%	8.93%	9.41%

St. James Episcopal Church

