

Christ Church Episcopal

Laredo, Texas



ESTABLISHED IN 1881

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1. Introduction

Who we are - Quienes somos

Christ Church Episcopal, Laredo: We are a friendly, welcoming, inclusive, Christian family. We seek a lifegiving connection with Jesus Christ, trust in His unconditional love, and hope to experience that love, friendship, grace and healing through our worship, stewardship, and community outreach.

Christ Church Episcopal, Laredo: Somos una familia cristiana cariñosa, inclusiva. Buscamos una conexión vital con Jesucristo, confiando en su amor incondicional esperando experimentar ese amor, amistad, gracia, y sanación por medio de la alabanza, mayordomía, y alcance a nuestra comunidad.

Baptisms



Communion



2. Brief Parish History

Christ Church turned 145 years old in 2025. While Episcopal Christians would gather at the Chapel at Fort McIntosh after the Mexican American War of the 1840s, regular meetings of a mission congregation started in 1871 as Reconstruction drew to a close. Initially the congregation met in a courthouse, (now the location of La Posada Hotel), but in 1881, the same year that newly established railroad lines expanded the regional population and commercial opportunities, Bishop Robert W.B. Elliot visited to organize the parish formally and encourage the nascent church to raise funds for a building. While the resulting edifice still stands in downtown Laredo at the corner of Davis and Farragut streets, by the mid-1960s, the congregation needed more space and parking and so moved to its current location at 2320 Lane Street.

3. The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Our Diocese consists of 26,000+ persons gathered in 87 congregations spread across 60 counties in Texas. We have an extremely responsive and caring diocesan staff, who see their jobs as providing congregations with the support and resources they need

<https://www.dwtx.org/>. And,

our collegial Bishops are very active in serving the clergy and the lay people of our diocese. <https://www.dwtx.org/who-we-are#bishops>

Bishop David Read and Suffragan Bishop Angel Cortiñas



4. Our Congregation

In 2023, our official membership consisted of 162 people:

18 children 0 to 12 years of age,

9 youth 13 to 17,

27 young adults 18-34,

70 middle-aged adults 35 to 64

38 senior adults 65 and older.

For the last 15 years, our congregation has averaged between 85 and 90 active households. About 50 percent of the families in our parish directory have traditional Hispanic surnames, and because most of us are from the area, we are blessed to have several multigenerational families. Like most of Laredo's population, our members are in large part bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish (although we do have members who only speak English and others who only speak Spanish).

Quinceañera celebration



Easter 2025 Baptisms



"Christ Church has given me a community of faith-minded people who help me grow in my own faith and help my neighbors."

Comments from the Congregation Survey,
2025

We serve our community as lawyers, contractors, teachers, university professors, medical professionals, small and large business owners, financial professionals, and more. Laredo's thriving business community and higher education institutions attract people from other parts of the United States and other countries, and we work hard to befriend both local and "transplant" visitors to our church.

Besides our Sunday Worship, our regular activities include such events as a first Sunday of the month parish lunch, a men's lunch group, a weekly Bible study, and a Saturday morning drive-through food bank ministry that provides groceries to 70 to 100 families per week.

Most of our other activities are tied to the church year. For example, we see between 100 and 200 people for "drive by ashes" on Ash Wednesday, as well as drive-by pet blessings in conjunction with St. Francis day. On the Sunday nearest to All Saints / All Souls and remaining Sundays in November, we encourage parishioners to memorialize folks who have passed with ribbons suspended over the chancel until after Christmas. In December we celebrate a Happy Birthday, Jesus party and a Christmas pageant is part of our Christmas Eve service. In early spring we celebrate Camp Sunday, highlighting the ministry of our Annual Diocesan Camps, and many parishioners attend the Diocesan Family Camp at Mustang Island.

2025 Happy Birthday Jesus Party



Family Camp at Mustang Island



Volunteers for worship ministries include young acolytes, ushers, lay eucharistic ministers, readers, choir, and an ad hoc altar guild. We have active vestry and finance committee members. And, we are usually successful in getting volunteers for one-shot events, including fundraisers, Christmas Pageant, Ash Wednesday, and more.



5. Youth and Children

Enthusiastic young volunteers help with Sunday ministries, performing the roles of acolytes, ushers and lay eucharistic ministry as well as performing other functions around the church. Occasionally families bring their kids to help with our Saturday food bank program, which also helps teens get school community

service hours. Other activities involving our youth include the annual Christmas Pageant, the Happy Birthday Baby Jesus party, and the Easter Sunday *Cascarón*-Egg Hunt.

Although the nursery is typically for children and infants seven years old and younger, because we do not have consistent Sunday School, many of the children play in the nursery and on the playground during the service.

6. Current Staff

Mrs. Connie Miles – Full time Office Administrator

Mr. Jesus Cruz – Custodian ½ time

Dr. Colin Campbell – Sunday Music Director

Ms. Arlethe Siftsoff – Sunday Nursery Attendant

Ms. Amalie Gutierrez – Sunday Nursery Attendant

Ms. Abigail Mandia – Sunday Videographer

The mission is to serve all those seeking God's commandments, guidance, and to serve our Laredo community in God's name."

Comments from the Congregation Survey, 2025

7. Our Location

Christ Church Episcopal is situated in Laredo, Texas, an international city on the Rio Grande River that defines the US-Mexico border, with a population of over 250,000 that is roughly 95% Hispanic. Laredo is an historically Catholic city that maintains a small-

town feel, where family and friendship relationships are important. While there are always new immigrants, the majority of our residents are from long term, multigenerational American and Mexican families, some with dual citizenship, and many Laredoans have roots going back to the original founders.

Laredo is an old city, founded in 1755 with a charter from Spain's King Ferdinand VI. In 1840, not long after Texas's 1836 secession from Mexico, Laredo joined with large parts of what are now the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon to form the short-lived Republic of the Rio Grande. After less than a year, General Antonio López de Santa Anna (infamous for his brutal victory over the Alamo in 1836) executed all the Republic's leaders and forced Laredo and the rest of the region to return to Mexico.

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo defined the boundary of the United States and Mexico as the Rio Grande, and most Laredo residents, still recovering from Santa Anna's brutality, chose to become U.S. citizens. Those who wished to remain Mexican crossed the river and founded our sister city, Nuevo Laredo, on the southern side of the Rio Grande.

A small section of the warehouse industry



Outlet mall downtown Laredo



While Laredo has always been a busy trade hub between the United States and Mexico, this expanded rapidly with the signing of NAFTA in 1992, and for the last three years Laredo has economically outperformed all the other ports of entry in the United States, including Los Angeles and New York. For example, while in 2023 U.S. global trade through all U.S. ports of entry was \$1.41 trillion dollars, Laredo's share in that trade was \$321 billion, or 22.8%. Because of this, warehousing, transportation, and freight forwarding companies are major employers. Still, many Laredo residents work for hospitals, colleges, public schools and City and County government as well as US Customs and Border Protection. The city maintains an international flair -- our border location makes international banking and retail trade targeted at Mexican customers extremely important.

Laredo, like many border communities, has been historically underserved by higher education. This has changed as Laredo College, with roots stretching to 1947, and Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) from 1970, have significantly increased the

number of college graduates in the region. In 2024 Pablo Arenaz, former president of TAMIU, noted that “in 1990, 11% of Laredo residents over 25 years old had a bachelor's degree; in 2000, that number was 14%, and in 2021, 23%. Arenaz also noted that while in 2000, 83% of graduates identified themselves as the first in their families to graduate from college, “[t]oday, that number has dropped to 55%,” demonstrating how education is expanding rapidly in the community. ([TAMIU President Arenaz discusses legacy at Laredo Gateway Rotary Club](#))

8. Our Challenges

The four most pressing challenges facing Christ Church are as follows, according to our recent Congregation survey:

- 1) **Finances:** We have always struggled to meet monthly expenses from pledges, plate offerings, and fundraisers. We have a small but growing endowment fund that generates \$10,000 annually. We also have a “donor advised fund” which we have used to supplement cash flow during slow giving times, and there is an account with \$71,000 left from our 2018 Capital Campaign which raised over \$750,000 for some very needed repairs and equipment upgrades.
- 2) **Attendance:** On any given Sunday, attendance can vary from 35 to 70 with no apparent reason for the fluctuation. In-person attendance dropped during COVID and is almost back to pre-COVID levels.
- 3) **Youth, Sunday School, and volunteers for these ministries:** Recruiting and retaining Sunday School and Youth ministry leaders has been a weak point for decades.
- 4) **The age of our volunteers:** The volunteers who help with Altar Guild, Lay Eucharistic Ministry, and to a lesser degree our Saturday Food bank, along with organizing fundraisers and special events like the Happy Birthday Baby Jesus parties, are usually our older members. Finding more places where younger members are interested in volunteering is important to us.

9. Our Hopes, Prayers, and Dreams

We want to provide thriving youth and children's programs and develop young adult programs that engage people. Additionally, we would like to have a rector who can connect with our current youth population and provide spiritual formation opportunities and fellowship activities.

We dream of growing beyond our walls and reaching into the surrounding area, connecting with our university and Jr. college, to share the message of Jesus with more

of the 250,000 citizens in the Laredo area. We also hope to plant a second Episcopal church in North Laredo.

10. The Rector We Seek

Our hope is to have a bilingual rector who can help us continue our spiritual growth and emphasize a newcomer ministry. We seek a rector who will participate in the church and in the local community, and who will help bring families with young children to our parish.

We would like to have a rector who can connect with our current young adult and youth population and provide spiritual formation opportunities and fellowship activities for all of us.

The new rector should be able to function in both Spanish and English or be willing to invest the time to learn. In any given setting of daily life in Laredo, speaking English, Spanish and above all “Spanglish” (code switching, going back and forth between both languages) is normal, so having such language skills is important.

Our new pastor needs to be able to shepherd families coming into the Episcopal Church from various backgrounds, whether these be Roman Catholic, Evangelical or Pentecostal, or non-Christian. Part of our attraction is our willingness to be inclusive, and to allow people to investigate the claims of Episcopal Christianity without fear of judgment or pressure.

Because of our Hispanic heritage, it is important for our new rector to understand the importance of cultural customs such as Quinceañeras, Dia de los Muertos, and more.

We are also looking for a pastor who will be active in the community. Our past clergy have engaged with Habitat for Humanity, Rotary Clubs, Casa Misericordia Domestic Violence Shelter, and more. Partnerships with the Sisters of Mercy in endeavors such as Casa Misericordia (for survivors of domestic abuse) have created points of unity across faiths.

Finally, in the congregational survey, two other skills were listed as being of major importance:

1. The ability to deliver a strong, thoughtful, inspiring sermon. Our congregants hope to have their “spiritual cups” filled each Sunday with word and sacrament to ensure we have energy and substance to share in our homes and community during the week.

2. 58% of Christ Church members who returned surveys listed “Developing and Supporting Youth Formation” as a major priority.

11. Sunday Worship

Sundays – Domingos

8:00 a.m. Rite 1 English & Spanish - Chapel – No music

11:00 a.m. Rite 2 English & Spanish - Church & Facebook online –



Dr. Campbell at happy birthday Jesus party Choir on a regular Sunday

Some folks wear coat and tie, and others come in shorts and polo shirts. All are welcome. Music at our later service includes both hymns and contemporary music using both organ and piano; some is in Spanish, and our clergy often do parts of the eucharistic liturgy in Spanish.

Our organist, Dr. Colin Campbell, on the faculty at TAMU, encourages us to worship with a wide variety of musical styles. He has composed a work celebrating the Rio Grande, “Rhapsody on the Rio Grande,” a piece incorporating organ, orchestra, and mariachi music [KLRN Specials | Rhapsody on the Rio Grande | PBS](#)

(Note: We did have a Spanish service which we stopped in 2025 as the attendance had dropped to two or fewer people, mostly due to the deaths of congregants. As we regularly include some Spanish language in our 8 and 11 a.m. services, Spanish-speaking visitors can now attend either of these services.)

12. Missions and Outreach

New Leaven Food Distribution – Our largest and most consistent outreach is our weekly food distribution program. Partnering with the South Texas Food Bank and their cost sharing program, we have become one of their largest distributors of groceries in Laredo. Our clients are seniors on fixed income, single parent households, and semi-employed or recently unemployed people. We distributed more than 250,000 lbs. of food last year, and on average we help 70 to 100 families a week, 48 weeks of the year.

Food storage and our Saturday distribution set up



Other areas of outreach:

We give office space to a licensed counselor from Methodist Healthcare Ministries, and house active Al-Anon and AA groups.

We have had some limited participation in Diocesan Short-Term missions.

We also have had a number of parishioners who serve as teachers and art directors at Camp Capers, our summer diocesan camp.

For the last 15 years, parishioners have volunteered to support the Seminary of the Southwest's Encuentro program, sharing their border experiences with first year students who visit Laredo in the spring.

Many of our parishioners are active volunteers with Casa Misericordia, the domestic violence shelter, and other local ministries and organizations.

13. Christian Formation

Christian Formation at Christ Church is an area which needs attention. We would like to have programs and events aimed at deepening faith across all stages of life.

As noted earlier, our Sunday School program is inconsistent. Decades ago, we had several teachers trained to use the Godly Play materials, as well as other curricula. The two major issues affecting our Sunday school are recruiting and retaining teachers, and especially since COVID, less frequent attendance from families with children.

We have until this past year had a weekly short children's sermon after the opening sentences and prior to the readings.

We had a regular Vacation Bible School during the summer until COVID, which we hope to revive this summer. We also believe that having our kids serve as acolytes, and our adolescents as lay Eucharistic ministers and ushers, is formative.

For the last three years we have hosted a Happy Birthday Jesus Party in December where we tell the Christmas story in a child-friendly format before a large creche in front of the altar.

Confirmation classes for teens are almost annual; we have used various formats for confirmation preparation.

Christian Formation of adults consists of a mid-week Bible Study, usually on Wednesday evenings in the Fall and Spring. This has been led by the rector, and since 2020 done in a hybrid in-person and online format. During Lent we usually observe the Stations of the Cross twice a week at noon and in early evening. About seven years ago during Advent, we began a twice weekly Noonday Stations of the Nativity service.

One major family event is Family Camp. Since 2013 parishioners have chosen to attend one of the Diocesan Family Camp Summer sessions at Mustang Island together. We usually have 30 to 50 people from our parish attending. We have provided some scholarship assistance from the parish discretionary funds for families that cannot pay the full amount. This has strengthened bonds between parishioners and is a beloved event for many parishioners.

Baptismal preparation, for parents and godparents of small children as well as older children and adults, usually involves three to six sessions of preparation led by the rector.

Finally, the Church's monthly parish luncheon provides a wonderful opportunity for fellowship, serving as both a social event and a key outreach activity that allows visitors and new members to form friendships within the warmth of the Christ Church family.

14. Laredo Demographic, Economic and Education

Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau <https://visitlaredo.com/>

Laredo Chamber of Commerce <https://laredochamber.com/>

Laredo Newcomers Club <https://www.facebook.com/LaredoNewcomers/>

Laredo Economic Development Corporation <https://www.laredoedc.org/>

U.S. Census quick profile info <https://data.census.gov/profile?q=Laredo+city,+Texas>

Public Schools

United Independent School District <https://www.uisd.net/>

Laredo Independent School District <https://www.laredoisd.org/>

Hector J. Garcia Early College High School <https://earlycollege.elisd.org/>

Julieta and Frank Staggs Academy
<https://www.tamui.edu/coedu/theacademy/index.shtml>

(There are a number of private elementary and middle schools in Laredo and one Parochial High school as well as several Elementary schools and Secondary Charter Schools.)

College and Universities

Texas A&M International University <https://www.tamtu.edu/>

Laredo College <https://www.laredo.edu/>

UT Education and Research Center at Laredo <https://www.utsystem.edu/offices/ut-center-laredo>

15. Membership, Sunday Attendance, and Financials

	2022	2023	2024
Membership	171	162	150
Average Sunday Attendance	59	56	62
Easter Sunday Attendance	141	145	189
Online Attendance	27	0	103
Baptisms	3	0	6
Marriages	2	0	3
Confirmations	12	0	0
Burials	9	5	4
Stewardship and Financials	2022	2023	2024
Pledge Cards	30	28	27
Amount Pledged	\$165,526	\$139,145	\$171,425
Operating Revenue	\$271,355	\$264,209	\$301,385
Operating Expenses	\$299,725	\$300,631	\$323,027

16. Church Facility

The current Church building was built in the 1960s. Over the past three decades we had four successful capital campaigns, first in the late 1990s to install an organ purchased from Trinity University, second in the early 2000's to build a safe playground, third in 2013 for new roofing and major repairs on the flat roof portions of our building, and a fourth most recently in 2018, which raised \$750,000 for improvements to the church, including major repair work on the bell tower, a renovated parking lot, bathroom remodeling, completely new A/C systems for both Church and Parish Hall, a new room dedicated to the New Leaven food distribution, a complete rebuilding of the organ, and an indoor columbarium.

We still have other planned projects but overall, our premises are well maintained, beautiful and peaceful.

17. Annual Services and Events

Camp Sunday

Ash Wednesday/Ashes on the go

Lenten Stations of the Cross

Palm Sunday

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Easter Sunday

Pentecost

Family Camp

Rummage Sale

30-30-30 Raffle

Blessings of Animals

Stations of the Nativity – Advent

Happy Birthday Jesus Party

Christmas Pageant

