

Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest



Church of the Messiah

Lower Gwynedd, Pennsylvania

Parish Profile

February 2024

Church of the Messiah seeks to be an inviting, welcoming, compassionate Christian community nurturing spiritual growth through the Word, our actions and gifts; thereby inspiring and uniting people to be examples of Christ's love.



At the core of Messiah's mission to be a **welcoming, compassionate Christian community** is our rector.

We seek a rector who will:

Lead Us Involve Us Look After Us
Feed Us Teach Us Celebrate Us



Lead Us

We seek a minister with overarching vision, who also learns our names and listens to our stories. **Our parishioners are looking for qualities such as approachability, warmth, humor and trust.** We are a family, and as such, there will be give and take, listening and sharing, flexibility and boundaries. **This requires an administrator who recognizes the potential and capabilities of our community.**

Throughout the past 25 years, our parish leadership style has changed from authoritative (i.e. mostly rector centric) to a **collaborative style with lay enabled leadership of several ministries.** This style has worked well, with many hard working volunteers who passionately believe in and lead ministries. However, in some cases, leaders have been in position for long periods of time, creating an unspoken, yet perceived tradition that might keep others from helping or even participating. In other cases, ministries have lost energy or direction, or leaders simply feel overwhelmed. **Our Messiah family searches for a rector who will continue to enable, and help energize lay leadership and purpose.**

Involve Us

With renewed focus and energy, ultimately, **more congregants will get involved, share meaningful experiences, and encourage others to join our church.** By prioritizing communication, both within our existing congregation and our community at large, we hope to inspire addition involvement in Messiah. A new rector leading in partnership with the Diocese, Vestry and members of the congregation, sharing his/her talents in tandem with God's future visions for Messiah, would surely be a successful collaboration.

We hope to find a leader who will encourage and honor volunteerism to align our individual gifts with ministries that support our mission. We seek a rector who will enhance and utilize our individual gifts to reflect Christ's love.



Look After Us

Our physical campus is aging and needs a rector with financial awareness and fresh, creative ideas to ensure the longevity of our church home. We also have members with needs for pastoral care and attention. **Even though we are at varied stages of our spiritual journey, a leader who meets us where we are, with availability and concern, would be a true gift.**

Feed Us

A rector who prioritizes personal spirituality, while truly living the liturgy, would inspire us each to do the same. A deep relationship with the Lord translates to messages that are Bible based and connected to our lives. Diverse sermons including conversational sermons, children's sermons, and thought provoking or challenging sermons, help us to feel nourished and engaged throughout the week. Our traditional Rite I and Rite II services may be supplemented with alternate liturgies, as **we are disciples, eager to learn and grow through the Word.**

Teach Us

Our community values Christian Education for all ages. Our youth presently have Sunday School programs which we would like to strengthen in order to attract more families with children and youth to our church. Adult Forum and book groups are available for adults. **We hope to enhance our faith and be spiritually educated through diverse offerings.**

Celebrate Us

As part of the Messiah family, our new rector will laugh, cry, pray, learn, share, and work with us to be examples of Christ's love. **Together, we will witness God at work among us.**

A Christian Community Nurturing Spiritual Growth

Our History

In 1861, a group of Philadelphia families, who summered in the Gwynedd area, began holding worship services in their homes and other facilities. **By December of 1866 these families, along with local farming families, formed a parish, obtained land, and called a rector.** In 1868, the parish was received by the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. Two years later, the congregation began constructing a church building at our current location. **On Christmas Day, 1871, the first service was held in the new church.** The parish added an adjacent rectory in 1885 and established the cemetery in the 1890's.



Original Church (1905), prior to any additions

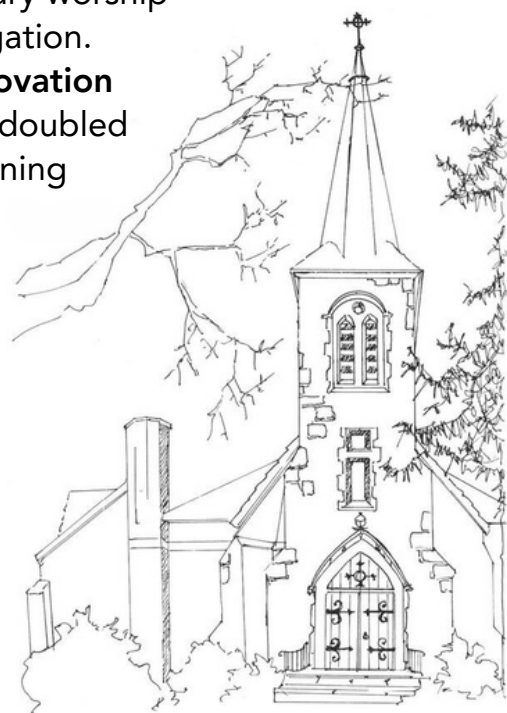
World War I was very difficult for the congregation as many families lost young men to the war. As a memorial, in the 1920's, the existing bell tower was added and configured with carillon bells.

Following World War II, the surrounding community grew rapidly as evidenced by a full church school, an active parish family, and strong attendance. As the need arose, additional facilities were built, including the south transept in 1950, and a new Parish Hall in 1961.

The Parish Hall incorporated an old school building which once stood next to the church. The new Parish Hall was then used as a temporary worship space, since the church building was too small for the congregation.

To meet the need for increased worship space, a major renovation of the original church was completed in 1991. This addition doubled the size of the sanctuary and added the narthex, while maintaining the essence of the historic architecture. Of particular note, is the fact that the capital expenses resulting from the renovation were paid in full within four years.

Historically, **our parish has been guided by twelve different rectors** serving for varying terms from three to thirty-five years. **Our most recent rector served for eighteen years until his retirement in June 2023.** The congregation has experienced periods of quiet growth, as well as periods of disquiet, often following trends of the national church.



The recent pandemic was a time of fluctuation, with rapid initiation of online services and a significant drop in attendance. **However, in many ways the challenges of forced isolation have strengthened our parish.** New technologies have been adopted, including the recording and live broadcast of services to expand access. New methods of communication, such as weekly e-mail messaging and a social media presence, have been implemented. **The periods of isolation further emphasized our sense of community and the need to cherish and celebrate our times together.**



Messiah marked our sesquicentennial in 2016 with several celebratory services set in Victorian style including a presentation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and a dinner with historical presentations held at the neighboring 300-year-old William Penn Inn.

Our Diocese

Formally organized in 1784, the [Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania](#) was built upon the Anglican tradition of its first congregation, Christ Church, "the Nation's Church," founded in 1695. Meeting in Philadelphia after the American Revolution in 1789, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America united its congregations under the leadership of William White, the first Bishop of Pennsylvania. The first autonomous province in communion with the See of Canterbury was created in Philadelphia, making our diocese the birthplace not only of the American Episcopal Church, but also of the Anglican Communion.

Today, under the leadership of The Rt. Reverend Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez, the Diocese comprises over 130 congregations. We are the fifth largest diocese numerically in the US and the smallest geographically. This revolutionary diocese welcomes adaptive, collaborative, and hearty clergy to be a part of it's innovative witness to Jesus Christ.



Our Home

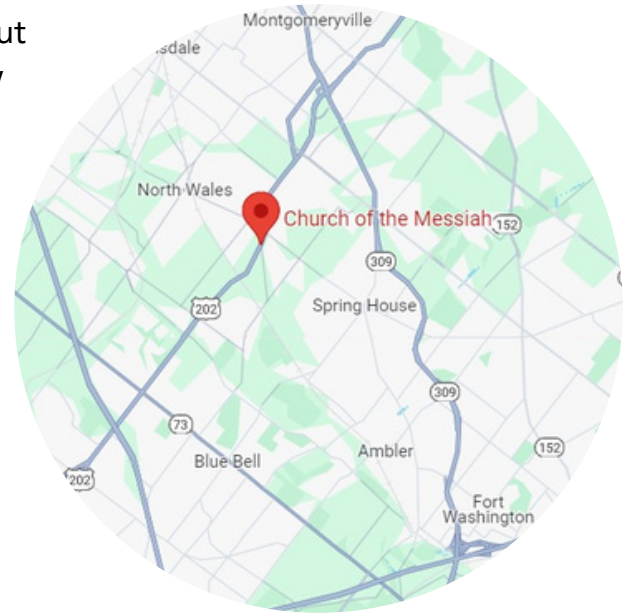
Messiah's beautiful facilities include four buildings on approximately seven acres of land. The native stone church has a current capacity of 350 and features a full pipe organ, a carillon that chimes ring to welcome worshipers before and after Sunday services, and multiple stunning stained glass windows.

Adjacent to our church is the Parish Hall. There we meet for fellowship as well as outreach and community activities. The Parish Hall contains administrative offices, meeting rooms, a large kitchen and the Guild Room, an all purpose room. The ground level of the Parish Hall is outfitted as an independent daycare center. Currently, the hall is in need of several renovations including air conditioning in the main space, an updated catering kitchen and upgrades to the bathroom facilities. A new metal roof was recently completed to complement the building and prevent water damage.

Belfry Bargains Thrift Shop, the former Patterson House, was originally built on the property as a Rectory in 1885. The barn behind Belfry Bargains (built at the same time) serves as a storage facility. The preservation and celebration of this historic campus is important to the congregation and is supported by the Property Ministry and capital campaigns.



Church of the Messiah is located in Gwynedd, PA, about 20 miles north of Philadelphia and 90 miles south of New York City. Situated along Route 202, or Dekalb Pike, the church is central to a number of suburban communities including the towns of Ambler, Blue Bell, Hatfield, Lansdale, North Wales, and the townships of both Upper & Lower Gwynedd, Montgomery, Towamencin, and Whitpain.



Central Montgomery County provides excellent educational and cultural resources. Montgomery County is ranked third of 67 Pennsylvania counties for colleges per square mile and offers excellently ranked public and private schools.

This area offers access to top-notch medical facilities such as Penn Health, Jefferson Health, Temple Health and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

The [Know Your Community](#) report created by Church Answers provides details of community demographics/psychographics within a 20 minute commute of Messiah. We enjoy a population of 457,000, with a median age of 43. There are 172,000 households in our vicinity. 75% of the surrounding residents hold white collar jobs and over 50% are college graduates. With just a 3% unemployment rate, 94% of our community remains above poverty level. However, pockets of residents requiring Messiah’s outreach assistance do exist.

There are roughly 19,000 businesses in our community. SEPTA provides access by bus and commuter rail. There are farms and open spaces as well, making the area geographically diverse. In addition to the suburban environment, public parks, walking trails and natural areas abound. For example, Valley Forge National Park is 14 miles from Messiah. Recreational activities and vacation opportunities can be found in the nearby Pocono mountains or New Jersey beaches. Philadelphia offers many cultural venues to enjoy dance, theater and music, and is also home to devoted sports fans. The Phillies, 76ers, Union, Eagles, and Flyers are local teams.

Our current church community recognizes the need to encourage diversity by inviting and accepting everyone. We hope that when people walk into Messiah, they feel at home. People in the congregation know and acknowledge each other by providing support and friendship. We value social opportunities to further our relationships, such as progressive dinners, pancake suppers, small group activities, coffee hours, and participation in community events such as “First Friday”. We respect the time, talents and treasures of our dedicated volunteers who offer so much to Messiah.

Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, [Harmony Theater](#), [MOMentum Coworking & Kids Club](#), and the Samaritan Counseling Center are currently hosted in Messiah’s Parish Hall. We hope to find additional ways to live our mission by strengthening our presence in the community.

Living the Word with Our Actions & Gifts

Worship

Guided by our Mission Statement to “nurture spiritual growth through the Word,” **our worship at Church of the Messiah is focused on the Eucharist.**



We currently use the Revised Common Lectionary, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and the 1982 Hymnal. Our weekly worship includes two Eucharistic services. The 8:00 AM service uses Rite I, without music. The 9:30 AM service which is typically larger, uses Rite II, and is enriched with organ, choir, bell choir and carillon. Church School currently begins at 9:30 with the children gathering in the Parish Hall classrooms. They join their parents in the Sanctuary for the Sharing of the Peace and the Eucharist.

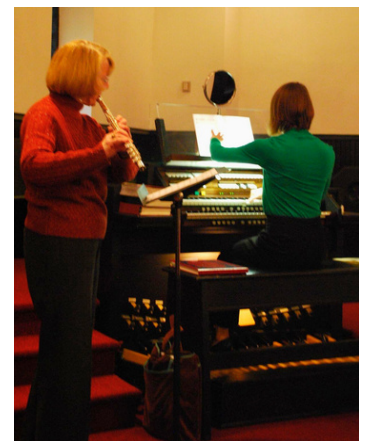
We enjoy celebrating festive times of the church year with special services. For example, a Celtic healing service has been offered. On Christmas Eve, the Eucharist has been celebrated with two services, while Christmas morning has offered a quiet, reflective service. Other special services have taken place during Lent and Holy Week. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday with the washing of the feet followed by the stripping of the altar, and then Good Friday’s solemn service are examples of worship opportunities. Easter is a festive service with special decorations, flowers, music and coffee hour afterwards.

To mark the end of the church school year, an annual outdoor service and picnic is a congregation favorite. Messiah members cherish and value worship to expand our spiritual knowledge and bring us closer to the Lord.

Music

Music is deeply embedded in the Messiah experience and strongly enhances the spiritual quality of our worship and sense of community at Messiah. Our services are enriched by a full pipe organ, a concert quality piano, an adult choir, carillon chimers, a handbell choir and guest artists for special services. All are directed by our talented organist and choirmaster who practices with each group several times a month.

We are confident the new rector, along with the Vestry, will continue to strengthen and extend music as part of Messiah’s worship services.



Christian Education

Children

Christian education for children ages 4-12 is provided by a team of dedicated volunteer teachers. The program utilizes the All-in-One (Group Publishing Company) Sunday school lesson series. This offers Bible lessons for mixed age classes such as ours. Vacation Bible School has, in the past, also offered lessons from this series. During the pandemic, "VBS In a Box" was used to continue the offering even at a distance. Outreach activities are planned for the children. For example, creating snack bags for the Caring for Friends organization. The annual Christmas pageant brings fellowship to the congregation, connecting Sunday school participants with adult communicants. Future plans continue to explore opportunities for children to participate in Sunday services.



Youth of Messiah - YOMs

For many years, we had a strong youth program including international and domestic mission trips. Messiah had a dedicated youth minister, with enthusiastic participants, and various service efforts. However, due to a decline in the youth population, our youth program is not currently active. We are exploring the reestablishment of a strong ministry for grades 7-12, through cooperation with other church youth programs within the Deanery.

Adult Education

Adult education at Messiah takes a variety of forms. Bible studies are presently offered by interim rector Father David Beresford. Rev. MaryJo Melberger, our former assistant rector, continues to offer discussion groups on books and varied scriptural topics. Christian adult education is also offered through studies of baptism, confirmation, reaffirmation and renewal of baptismal vows. We have enjoyed experiential Rector-led pilgrimages and mission trips, such as recent trips to the Holy Land, Guatemala and Oberammergau. We are eager to continue growing spiritually.





Ministries

Messiah ministries are critical elements of faith and are worthy of our time, reflection, and practice. **Upreach, inreach and outreach are dependent upon each other, one is the fuel and the other two are the engines.** We strive to strengthen and support members of our various ministries so that they are able to excel in work that is meaningful and celebrated.



Upreach - Connecting with God

Upreach ministries during worship services include lay readers, adult choir, acolytes, lay chalice bearers, ushers, greeters, flowers, handbells, carillon, organ and piano.

Inreach - Connecting with One Another

We are not designed to be alone in our faith journey. We deepen and mature through our "one-another-ness". Messiah's current connection ministries include Fellowship, Hospitality, Prayer Shawl, Prayer Chain, Property, Home Visitors, and Eucharistic Ministers.



One of the most important components of evangelism at Messiah is Coffee Hour. The weekly invitation to enjoy fellowship after the service is vital for church growth and sustainability. Coffee Hour is not an afterthought of the worship service, but is designed to join together the community. What happens in the Sanctuary is formal worship; what happens in the Parish Hall is informal worship. The Fellowship Ministry delights in extending the warmth and welcome we proclaim, to share the grace we have acknowledged.

Outreach - Connecting with Our Community

God reaches out, through us, to help and support others who are outside our faith community. Outreach is not an activity, an event, or even a process; it is people serving people. Our goal is to help each other to know and discover the strength of our own identity in Christ so our lives will produce fruit. Outreach is every person moving through a personal spiritual journey in communion.



Our current outreach ministries include Manna on Main Street Food Cupboard, Messiah Meals, Vacation Bible School, and our thriving thrift shop, [Belfry Bargains](#).



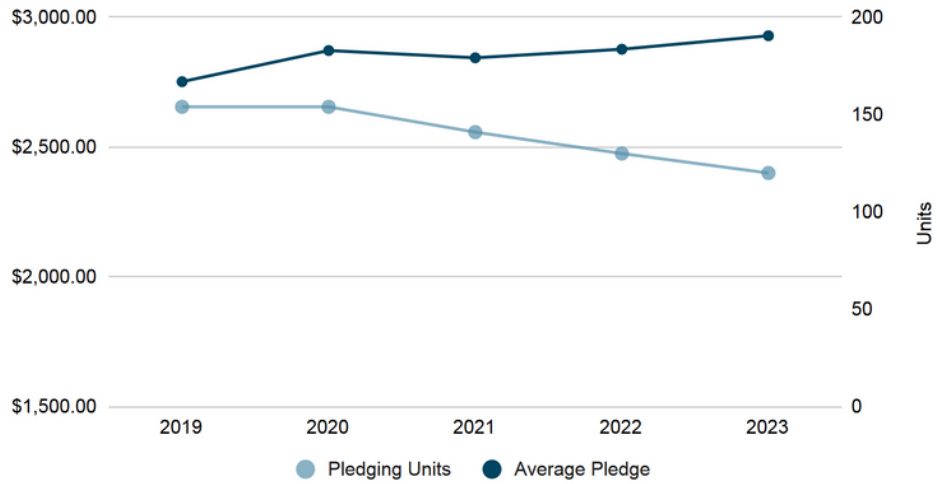
Since 1983, Belfry Bargains has donated 100% of all proceeds from the sale of pre-owned clothes and home goods to local, national and international causes and agencies outside the parish. With roughly 70 volunteers, the shop is a bustling draw for consumers and volunteers from both Messiah and neighboring communities. Last year, approximately \$45,000 dollars were donated in outreach through the sale of donated merchandise.

Stewardship/Financials

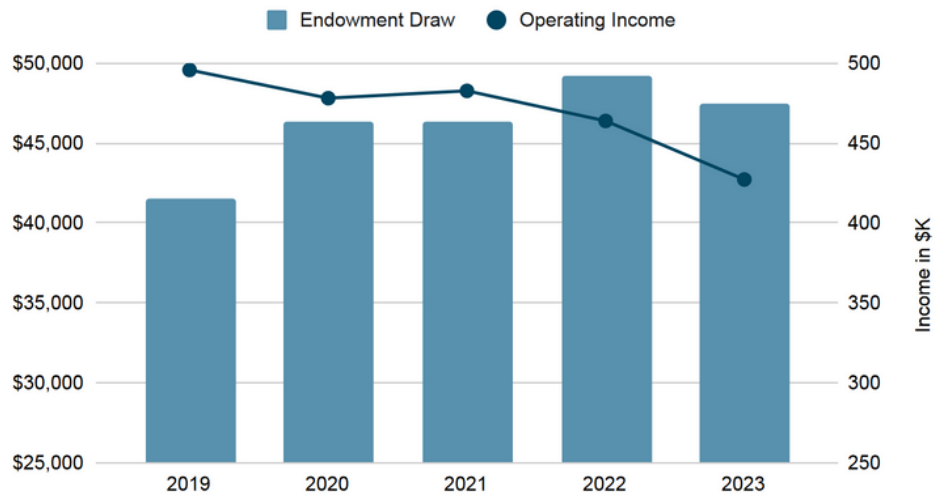
The financial state of the parish is strong as we have been blessed with an enduring endowment, maintained by our Investment Committee, of approximately \$1M, allowing for annual draws to supplement our pledging. However, current downward trends in both attendance and pledging units have presented challenges to the creation of annual budgets which preserve the endowment and still meet our operating and capital expenses. Fortunately, the decline in pledging units has gratefully been offset somewhat by increasing pledge amounts per unit.

The ongoing need to maintain and preserve our existing physical plant has required creative approaches to funding this work, as recent needs have exceed the amounts available from the operating budget. For example, in 2023 some of the property expenses were met from the one-time sale of a church owned property. Going forward, these needs may require a capital campaign to be spearheaded by the new Rector and the Vestry.

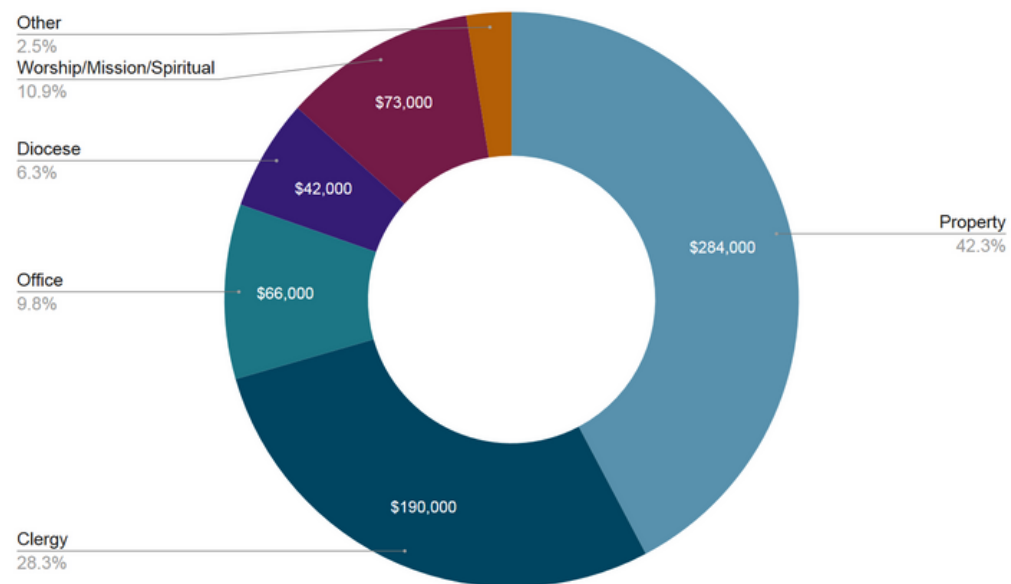
Annual Pledging



Endowment Draw & Operating Income



2023 Operating Expenses (\$672K)



To be Examples of Christ's Love

Our Values

During the transition process, to make sure we understood the pulse of our members, we held in-person, "Holy Conversations." These small group discussions were attended by over 80 members. In addition, 78 parishioners completed the [Holy Cow!](#) national online survey. After analysis, five main themes emerged.

First, worship is of utmost importance at Messiah. We find comfort and meaning in the traditions of Episcopal worship and Christian education. We value music and want to expand our music ministry.



Second, ministries that match Messiah's mission, both within the church and in the community are essential. We want to be involved, trained and valued for our ministerial participation. We want to be sure new attendees are warmly greeted, welcomed, and included by many members of our church family. Inclusivity means acceptance through purposeful interaction. Our members value ministry participation that is meaningful and enhances our spirituality and fellowship.

Third, we yearn to enrich and expand congregational relationships, for example, creating opportunities for the 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM attendees to socialize, learn, and provide service together, would expand the relationships between these two groups.

Fourth, pastoral care is critical. Since many in our congregation are aging, we highly value pastoral care provided by clergy and lay members to connect and support us all, especially when we are sick, injured or grieving a loss in our lives.

Finally, we recognize that change is always challenging, yet we can excitedly imagine a transformed church with more vitality and possibilities. **We are confident our new rector will guide us through necessary vision-driven changes that are incremental, purposeful and prayerful.**

As our Mission emphasizes, we will warmly welcome our new rector to lead us, involve us, look after us, feed us, teach us, and celebrate with us, while together we marvel in God's abounding grace.

Grateful Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this Profile including all members of Messiah who participated in our Holy Conversations and on-line Profile survey. In addition, special thanks to Brett Baker for his amazing drone photos, to Jean London for the many photos provided, Sarah Patram for the financial information, and to Meredith Sisson for her wonderful skills in layout and design.

We are especially grateful for the hard work and dedication of the members of the Profile Committee including Melanie Baker, Edie Amey, Marti Bender, Tonia Uffner and Mercer Sisson. The opportunity to work together was truly a manifestation of God's blessings and work among us.



Church of the Messiah

The Episcopal Church in Gwynedd Pennsylvania

1001 Dekalb Pike
Lower Gwynedd, PA 19002
www.messiahgwynedd.org
215-699-9204

All questions about this position and all applications should go directly to the **Office of Transitions at the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania**. All applicants should send their letter of interest, CV/Resume, and OTM profile to:

Rev. Canon Jane Gober
jgober@diopa.org
215-627-6434