

Stone Church of Willow Glen 2016

Mission Study

11/14/2016



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Executive Summary

Stone Church is a Presbyterian (PCUSA) church with a history of social action in an affluent part of San Jose. With a membership of 370, the church is the third-largest in the San Jose Presbytery and above-average overall for PC(USA) churches nationwide. Stone Church members pride themselves on living a Christian life rather than evangelizing. We cherish the broad sense of inclusiveness that Stone offers, welcoming and respecting a variety of cultures, lifestyles, faith practices and beliefs. Members value the opportunity to grapple with issues of faith intellectually and practically, through sermons and adult education, and through local and global mission work. With more younger families joining and getting involved, Stone Church feels like an optimistic, lively, and growing church, maintaining its Presbyterian traditions, close sense of community, and history of social justice activism while continuing to be relevant in today's world.

While joyful about the many ways that Stone Church is thriving, the congregation recognizes areas where the church can continue to grow and adapt. Members hope to find ways to expand the diversity (age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, backgrounds, etc.) of our membership, and seek to forge greater connections not only among those diverse groups, but also among the groups already within the church (generational groups, long-time and new members, and so on). Stone Church can improve its communication and focus, making sure its members fully understand and participate in the life and future of the church, and build upon the strong foundation already in place.

Stone Church of Willow Glen Mission Statements

Vision Statement at the Founding of Stone Church (1946)

We are -

- The church of the warm heart, the open mind, the adventurous spirit that cares, heals, comforts, challenges;
- That knows no division of color or class or frontier;
- That inquires and looks forward as well as backward;
- The church of the Master, and of the people;
- A working, worshipping, winsome church;
- That interprets the truth and challenges its times;
- That inspires courage for this life, and hope for the life to come.

Mission Statement Update

(Adopted by Session March 14, 1995 and reaffirmed by Session March 9, 2006)

Our mission is to live our faith as a congregation, inspired by Jesus Christ as individuals and as a corporate body, and to move forward in our mission of peace within our church, our community and the world. We covenant to:

- Be stewards of God's Word and Actions;
- Develop strong lay leadership;
- Provide for the regular worship of God in accord with Presbyterian precepts and traditions;
- Be Christian educators with each other in all facets of our lives;
- In the spirit of Psalm 78, to teach our sons and daughters, that it might be known to a future generation, to children yet unborn to put their trust in God, to hold God's great acts ever in mind and to keep God's commandments;
- Welcome diversity and sing our differences in harmony and without fear;
- Constantly expand our service to our community and to the world through mission outreach;
- Support each other in living our faith at home and in our work in the world.

Recommendations

This committee recommends that Session consider the following for action and that these needs be taken into account as the church embarks on the work of finding a new pastor:

Worship

- Maintain and strengthen the music program
- Continue the practice of traditional worship services

Christian Education

- Expand Adult Christian Education offerings for a wider range of interests
- Create and expand more youth Christian learning opportunities

Membership/Stewardship

- Consider appointing mentor/sponsors to more effectively integrate new members into the life of the congregation
- Create and expand cross-generational opportunities for connection
- Look into ways to help members contribute in stewardship and service
 - Getting people involved without just calling for volunteers
 - Matching people to needs and helping people feel and be valued
 - More involvement from those who are not the “always” faces (possibly through providing child care at Session/Deacon meetings or other means of allowing parents with younger children to participate)

General

- More opportunities for direct mission service (e.g. mission fair, etc.)
- More focused mission projects
- Renewed focus on diversity
- Improved communication about the work of committees and Session to the congregation
 - Published minutes and listing of meeting times and committee chairs/members
 - Explicit encouragement/recruitment to participate
 - Committee Fair/Rally Day

Information collection process

This mission study is intended to establish a snapshot of Stone Church in its current iteration -- what we as a church value in our mission, faith and worship experience, and where we hope to move as a church over the next years and decades. This study derives its information from a number of different places in order to hear as many voices and perspectives as possible.

Survey: An all-church survey was conducted, both online and via paper, which garnered 114 responses. (Appendix)

Discussion: Small round table groups (open to anyone who wished to attend) were held after worship on three consecutive Sundays and which had 10-15 people in attendance each time. (Appendix)

Committee reports: Each committee reporting to Session had the opportunity to share their concerns and ideas. (Appendix)

Youth feedback: Youth leaders held discussions with middle school and high school youth separately. (Appendix)

Church reports: Information was also taken from the Stone Church 2015 church report and the Ten-Year Trends Summary. (Appendix)

Stone Church background

Stone Church of Willow Glen was founded in 1946 as a Presbyterian Church in a prosperous San Jose neighborhood. Its members share a strong belief that Christian life, while valued as a theological and intellectual pursuit, also demands a practical affirmation of Christ's love for humanity through feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and housing the homeless. Stone Church explicitly embraces a progressive theology and its involvement in social issues is reflective of that. It has a history of being on the front lines of social justice issues, from sending a pastor to march with Dr. King in the early days of the Civil Rights movement, to sponsoring refugee families, to hosting the Rotating Homeless Shelter over the objection of some of the neighbors, to dissenting with the PC(USA) on the issue of ordination for LGBT people (until the PC(USA) caught up with us).

Stone Church in the past has experienced below-average per-member pledging (see MSC 2006) but over the past ten years has managed to pay off a capital improvement program, return to a two-pastor staffing model in 2012 and expand mission programs within the church, such as Angel Grants and Stephen Ministry.

Stone Church now

Stone Church in 2016 has 370 members with an average worship attendance of 207, which is up substantially from ten years ago. (Membership in 2005 was 371, but average worship attendance was 160, and membership for the years 2006-2012 hovered at or below 350.) Children and youth number close to 80, from babies in the nursery to high school youth group participants. Stone Church members are a well-educated (more than 47% hold an advanced graduate degree) and overwhelmingly white congregation (more than 93%) with an explicit desire to increase our congregation's racial and ethnic diversity. There has been an increase in the participation and activity among younger families of the church. Most of the congregation works full-time or is retired from work; there are few full-time homemakers. More than half live 3 miles or closer to the church, and 80% of survey respondents live within 8 miles.

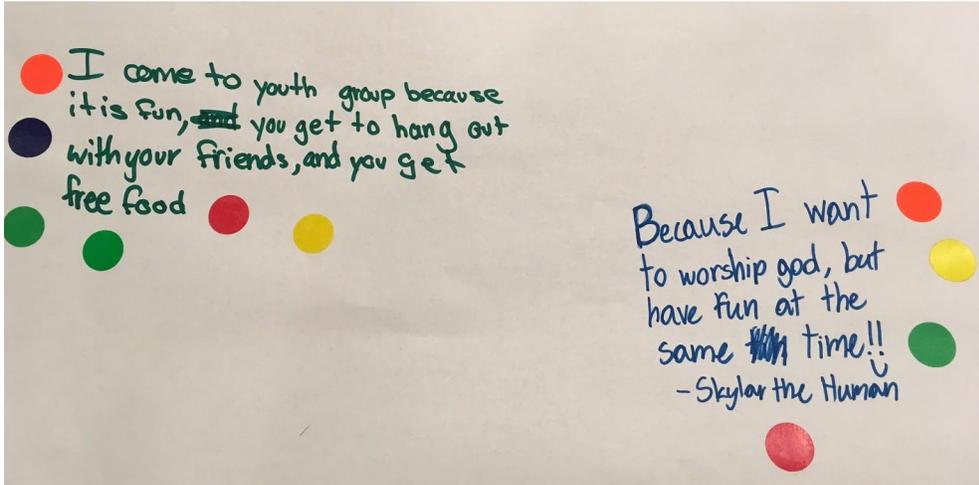
People visit Stone Church for a variety of reasons and stay on as members or regular visitors for many of the same reasons. Survey respondents say they were originally drawn to Stone Church because of its location, because of its progressive and open approach to social issues (the rainbow flag and church stance on LGBTQ issues was mentioned as a draw, as well as the deaf ministry program), because of its traditional worship service and high-quality music and choir, and because of the minister and the friendliness of the people. They stay for the same reasons, citing the **experience of worship (thought-provoking sermons, traditional worship structure, traditional hymns, exceptional music) along with the progressive stance of the church and the warmth and friendliness of the congregation.**

Overall, people feel like the church excels at valuing its members. Lay leadership is highly valued (according to 90% of survey respondents), and all congregants (youth, children and adults alike) feel welcomed and encouraged to participate in the life of the church. Over 60% of survey respondents participate in two or more Stone Church organizations, committees or groups. Congregants largely feel that Stone Church is finding the right mix of traditional Christian teaching along with discussion and education around contemporary issues, and the right mix of support for world social causes and local mission work. **Most people really love the sense of purpose and community they find within Stone Church** and want to maintain that.

There is also general consensus among members about the stance of the church in Christian education, mission and social causes. Over 80% of respondents feel that Stone Church provides the right amount or could do a little more in providing adult education that examines the Bible and Christian tradition, as well as education that deals with contemporary issues and problems. Roughly the same percentage feel that Stone Church provides the right amount or could do a little more in providing the youth of Stone Church with a grounding in Christian tradition and faith, while encouraging an open search for a faith that makes sense in their lives.



We also value youth contributions, recognizing them as the future of the church, and actively try to engage and integrate the young people of the church. A resurgent youth group that periodically leads worship services; a youth deacon and youth elder who serves on Session; a vibrant church school program which includes a children's choir that performs during worship are just a few of the examples of youth involvement.



Vision for the future of Stone Church

The church is also remarkably in accord on areas where we can grow. While many people mention the closeness and community within Stone Church, this can leave some feeling excluded or unconnected. **The congregation is looking for ways to create and strengthen connections between new members and long-time members, across generations, and between very-involved and less-involved congregants.** This could take the form of more events that allow members to interact with each other, a wider variety of adult education offerings to create connections, stronger mentorship of new members, and a means to help all members maximize their contributions (of time and talent as well as money) as part of stewardship. Establishing norms that are more inclusive (meeting a new person and inviting them to help with coffee or helping to usher, for instance) would allow more people to participate and to create new connections.



Congregants also expressed a wish to **expand their faith and their personal relationship to God**, through experiences like the Taizé service, meditation or more

opportunities for silence. Close to 50% of survey respondents felt that Stone Church could do more to help individuals discover their own gifts for ministry and service. This could fall under the umbrella of improving inclusiveness and forging connections between members but could also be part of a stewardship mission to help people to discover how they can serve. Over 30% of respondents also wanted more opportunity to participate in and support local mission projects.

Stone Church also has a strong desire to create diverse connections, both inside and outside our walls. Over 70% of survey respondents felt strongly that we should be actively seeking to **increase the diversity of our congregation**, and close to 65% also expressed a wish to participate in programs and activities with other religious or faith groups. Some members feel that the congregation lacks diverse viewpoints and thus misses the opportunity for rich dialogue and discussion around issues of faith and social justice. Session and Deacons have already begun the process by actively seeking out more diverse members of the congregation to serve in the most recent class, but the options are limited within a relatively homogeneous congregation.

Finally, many members would like to know and understand more about church governance and direction, and how to meaningfully participate. There is a sense from some respondents that Session and various committees are not always clearly communicating their actions, goals and plans for meeting those goals to people who aren't actively involved. **Stone Church members seek a means for feeling more directly informed and involved in the direction of the church.** This could take the form of publishing committee minutes, or providing committee updates in the monthly newsletter, or simply posting meeting times and committee names. Having a Committee Fair or other way to expose new members to the work of the church is another possibility.

Summary of what we value as a church and want to maintain

- *Christian education for youth and adults is the right mix of Biblical tradition and dealing with contemporary issues*
- *Support for social issues globally and denominationally (e.g. Presbyterian Disaster Relief)*
- *Youth and children are valued and encouraged to participate (youth group, church school, youth elder)*
- *Lay leadership valued*
- *Members feel valued and welcomed*
- *Traditional worship service (traditional music, structure, etc.) with engaging and challenging sermons*

Summary of how we would like the church to grow

- *More effectively integrate new members into the life of the congregation*
- *Additional opportunities for people to forge connections and relationships*
- *More opportunity for exploration of faith (through education and experiences)*
- *More opportunities for local mission*
- *Greater diversity in the church*
- *Improved communication about the work of Session and committees to the wider church*
- *Facilities improvement for better inclusivity (better lighting and sound, elevator for downstairs)*

Appendices

Survey results (117 respondents)

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BwnvVwfvAv4fR3VpMHBDNThrb28>

Youth group notes

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZFFGJzeCILpN75i7US2MmGeyRLTJrM4T09InjQG-jnk/edit?usp=sharing> (High School group)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1m-TNjw8BfK_818gq6JnOcPajdZhTXMf6JysPDli4kjq/edit?usp=sharing (Middle School group)

Committee notes

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fTYdPZ1V4417xOOY1v-4Knj2qyYu-yfJTsx-jARhFWI>

Round table notes

(Q1: What do you love and/or value about Stone Church?)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwnvVwfvAv4faW4teVByTEpTZGt1dDFLek5MdV9kbDdRVEgw/view?usp=sharing>

(Q2: What would you like to see at Stone Church that is not currently in place?)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwnvVwfvAv4faW4teVByTEpTZGt1dDFLek5MdV9kbDdRVEgw/view?usp=sharing>

(Q3: What would make your experience at Stone Church more fulfilling?)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NheKALzjBwzrvdpfG5_B3-WhB_n1fPC_WGWI8Y_Czq0/edit?usp=sharing

2015 Church report

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BwnvVwfvAv4feFprTE92RGROLWZleDIqOUFpd1hWdnQ3SnJv>

Ten-Year Trend

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BwnvVwfvAv4fQS1RT0E2MnBPb1JDV1U5RHU2VEFwaExGRklw>