

JUSTICE

Rev. Ken Henry prays at raising of the rainbow flag at City Hall on Pride Day 2014



OUR IDENTITY AND HISTORY

MAIN POINTS

- Stone Church is known for its social justice witness, intellectual engagement, tradition and leadership in the Presbytery of San Jose.
- How and why we define our neighborhood as we do in this report.
- Willow Glen was a 6-year-old town that agreed to be annexed by San Jose because it couldn't afford to build its own sewer system.
- Shortly afterward, as the end of World War II approached, the San Jose Presbytery and other Christian denominations established neighborhood churches.
- Willow Glen was one of the first examples of how San Jose's development mirrored the sprawl of the Los Angeles area.
- Willow Glen is a neighborhood in a city whose residents sleep here at night and commute outward to high-tech jobs in smaller, surrounding cities.

- Today, many children who grew up in our church can't afford to live nearby, nor could many of our congregation buy in Willow Glen at today's prices.
- Our future lies within the neighborhood of our church's founders.

Stone Church celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2022 as a church known for its social justice witness, intellectual engagement, traditional music and worship and leadership in the Presbytery of San Jose. But our congregation has not marched in lockstep, and we have survived controversies ranging from minor disagreements to membership losses.

As an example of our leadership in the Presbytery, in 2008, our congregation contributed more than 80 volunteers to every aspect of the leadership, planning and operation of the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) held in San Jose. Our members and staff led committees, directed and sang in the choirs, prepared and served communion for nearly 10,000 worshippers, and conducted tours for attendees from around the world. No other church in the Presbytery of San Jose or the San Francisco Bay Area equaled our effort.

Social justice is part of our DNA, and our congregation survey found that we believe it's at the center of the Gospel. In 1965, Stone's controversial pastor, the Rev. Bill Perdue, marched for Civil Rights in Selma, Alabama. In the 1990s, it hosted notable theologians such as Marcus Borg, Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong and former Catholic priest John Dominic Crossan. Our congregation formally dissented from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s ban on gay and lesbian ordination in 1998, years before it was removed from the Book of Order. The Rev. Ken Henry became a go-to speaker for annual City Hall Gay Pride Week observances. When a group of deaf and gay members joined Stone Church, they were elected to leadership positions and helped us learn some basic American Sign Language words so we could "sing" the Doxology together.

*Remember the days of old,
consider the years long past; ask
your father, and he will inform
you, your elders, and they will tell
you.*

Deuteronomy 32:7 (NRSVUE)

We partnered with other churches in hosting rotating shelters for the homeless, which involved significant volunteer organization to provide meals and other services, and partnered with other religious groups, including Muslims and Buddhists, to host interfaith Thanksgiving observances. Most recently, members renovated the church-owned Roycott House to convert it into a home for an Afghan refugee family. Today the rainbow flag and Black Lives Matter banner hang outside the church and are on the homepage of our website.

WHAT IS WILLOW GLEN?

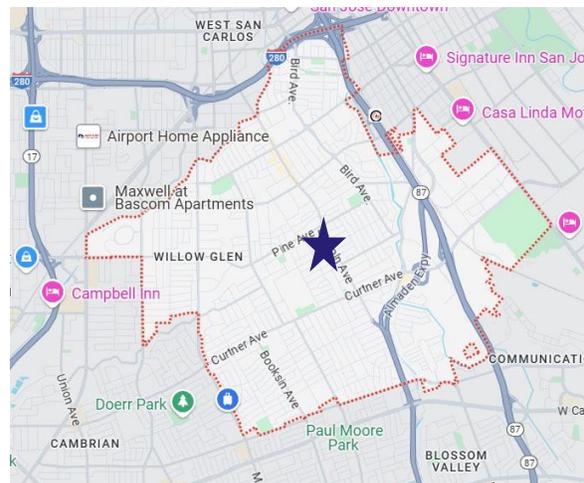
From Stone's earliest years worshiping in the original chapel, growing into a new auditorium in 1950 (now our social hall) and in 1955 into the current sanctuary with its magnificent stone walls and pipe organ, installed in 1986, there has been a strong music program focused on traditional hymns sung by the congregation and mostly classical music sung by our choir.

Slightly more than half of our members (53%) live in the 7-square-mile 95125 Zip Code, which is the Willow Glen post office and has a defined boundary. Only one other Zip Code in our membership roster has as many as 10% of our addresses. Willow Glen is one of San Jose's 18 unique neighborhoods identified by Visit San Jose, the city's public-private tourism nonprofit, and mostly lies within City Council District 9 and entirely within District 4 of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

But in popular usage, what the name "Willow Glen" means depends upon whom you talk with, and that description can vary with perspective and motive. If you're selling your house, do you want to benefit from Willow Glen's expensive cachet? Or if your family name ends in "ez" and your children attend Gardner Elementary — literally across the tracks — do you feel part of the Willow Glen vibe that a Curtner Avenue resident twice as far from Willow Glen's historic downtown feels? An important reason for these differences dates to the neighborhood's formative years when, according to a study published in 2024 by the Stanford Law School, one in four local property deeds contained racial restrictions.

Stone Church lies at the geographic center of both Zip Code and the Willow Glen of the imagination, so this report uses both terms interchangeably for our neighborhood. We do so because we want to follow Jesus' example and reach across all the ethnic, economic and social barriers that people use to divide themselves and impose hierarchies. His philosophy underlies the song we sing: "Draw the circle, draw the circle wide."

Eight years before the church's founding in 1944, the independent city of Willow Glen, then just six years old, agreed to be annexed by its much larger, older and established neighbor to the north — San Jose, California's first state capital — because San Jose had a sewer system that Willow Glen — built on recently drained farmland — couldn't afford. The future was not entirely clear as the end of World War II began to come into view, but the San Jose Presbytery made a \$3,125 bet that Willow Glen's orchards and fields would become a neighborhood where families, formed in peacetime, would build lives, homes, and walk to church. The money bought three lots at the corner of Lincoln Avenue, Willow Glen's main street, and Clark Way but no land for a parking lot.



The star marks the location of Stone Church within the highlighted 95125 Zip Code.

Google Maps

Willow Glen, a "California Dream" neighborhood, was being imagined at the same time by other Christian denominations, and within several blocks of what would become Stone Church's campus, new Episcopal, Methodist and Baptist churches were built. The people who filled our — and their — pews were parents of a generation that came to be known as Baby Boomers. These congregations have all experienced the effects of social and economic forces

in Willow Glen that our church is wrestling with. For example, Willow Glen Baptist's first building was erected in 1948; it's now San Jose Bible Church, part of a national non-denominational group of churches called the Gospel Coalition.

Today's Willow Glen is peppered with at least 18 churches including a large Catholic parish, St. Christopher's, mainline Protestant and non-denominational churches, and a megachurch, the 12,000-member Cathedral of Faith.

There are also 19 schools from elementary through high school. Thirteen of them, including a charter school, are public schools in the San Jose Unified and Campbell Union school districts. Of those, a high school, middle school and five elementary schools are within a one-mile radius of Stone. The private schools include two Catholic schools and a non-denominational Christian school.

Today's Willow Glen was one of the first of more than 1,400 annexations by San Jose by 1969, nearly all of them in order to build sprawling residential suburbs. The expansion set San Jose on course to become the San Francisco Bay Area's largest city, California's third most populous city after Los Angeles and San Diego, and the nation's 12th-largest city in the 2024 census update with 1 million people.

Our neighborhood (95125 Zip Code)	
Population	54,000
White	47%
Hispanic	24%
Asian	14%
Population density	7,412 / mile ²
Avg. household income	\$148,422
Avg. house value	\$1,646,000
Education	56% Bachelor's or higher
<i>Source: US Census Community Survey 2020</i>	

Unlike the way most cities develop, however, San Jose grew as a residential, not corporate hub. It is where most of Silicon Valley sleeps at night. "We are the only major city in the country that has a smaller daytime population than nighttime population," then Mayor Sam Liccardo told the *New York Times* in a 2017 interview.

The high-tech workers who began arriving by the tens of thousands in the 1960s bought houses in San Jose to commute to high-tech company headquarters in outlying communities to the north along the San Francisco Peninsula. As the tech economy matured, it attracted not just the most talented tech workforce in the United States but from around the world with the world's highest wages and benefits. English is still the most widely spoken language here, but it's the first language of only 43% of our city's residents, according to Visit San Jose.

The reality for the Baby Boomers, who are now the backbone of our aging congregation, is that many of our children cannot afford to live nearby. Nor could many of us afford to buy our own homes at current prices even if we weren't retired on fixed incomes. Within a 100-yard radius of Stone Church, houses are valued at \$1.5 million to \$2.9 million on Zillow's lot maps. Their median value has nearly doubled in the last 10 years.

Fifty-three percent of Willow Glen is white, and the remainder can be divided into three roughly equal sized groups: people from Asia or of Asian descent, some other race, and multi-

racial people, according to census data for our Zip Code. A third of all residents are singles or singles with roommates. A third are households with children.

The bottom line of this statistical equation, however, is that we are a small congregation within a diverse neighborhood of 54,000 residents. Our committee believes there is enormous potential for reinvigoration and growth at Stone Church within the community that originally nourished our founders by meeting their needs as 21st Century families.



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'
*Along Roycott Way within a stone's throw
of Stone Church, life is leafy and leisurely*