



## WHAT OUR RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT US

### SUBSECTIONS

- Methodology
- Who we are by the numbers
- When we are at our best
- What following Jesus means
- Where following Jesus would take us

### METHODOLOGY

The Mission Study Committee conducted two forms of surveys on various aspects of the church, congregational life and aspirations for the future. A full report on our small-group listening sessions is in **Appendix B, Page 46**. The full list of questions and responses to the 2024 online congregational is in **Appendix E, Page 79**.

The first survey, chronologically, was the online survey using the Survey Monkey tool in early 2024. It consisted of 71 questions dealing with seven categories of information: membership demographics and economic status, church participation, church communications, members' expectations of the church, their expectations for a new pastor, members' theological views, and open-ended questions about members' concerns and hopes about Stone Church's future. The survey was developed from previous Stone Church surveys,

guides published by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other presbyteries, and from questions submitted by our members. The full list of those resources is in **Appendix A, Page 43**.

- We distributed 266 surveys and received 126, a response rate of 47%, which is higher than our average Sunday morning attendance.
- Respondents took the survey privately and answered anonymously.
- Respondents spent an average of 47 minutes, according to Survey Monkey's report.

In early 2025, the Mission Study Committee organized a series of small-group listening sessions with a maximum of 10 people each to allow members to give longer answers to a series of questions designed to gain insight about their experience at, and aspirations for, Stone Church.

To ensure maximum participation, members were asked to list times most convenient to them and then the committee created 90-minute sessions for individuals whose availability coincided.

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves.*

2 Corinthians 13:5a (NRSVUE)

- There were eight adult sessions who responded to the same set of questions plus one session for youth, one for teachers/leaders of children and youth, and one Zoom session for young adults, each with a unique question set.
- The sessions were attended by approximately 120 people.
- Responses were made in a group setting and were recorded by a note taker, but participants were guaranteed anonymity outside the group and responses in **Appendix B, Page 46** do not include names.

## WHO WE ARE BY THE NUMBERS

**A**s one member wrote answering a question in the online congregational survey about why people stay at Stone, “Stone Church is HOME!”

Broadly characterized, we’ve been here a long time, our friends sit with us in the pews, and we have no plans to leave the neighborhood where we’ve lived for so long. The fact that we are comfortable should not be interpreted as complacency or that we have no concerns about the future of Stone Church. Our listening sessions revealed significant challenges that are common to many churches across the country.

There is a sense of grief over the lack of a vibrant, thriving, well-attended youth program. Young families once formed a vital part of the congregation. Our aging membership, combined with a decline in volunteer support for the youth programs, is

evidence of volunteer fatigue and stretched leadership. Of survey respondents asked about their biggest concerns, 30% answered with either aging or new membership issues.

Our members are ...	
White	94%
Willow Glen residents at least 20 years	87%
Unlikely to move	76%
65 years or older	70%
Female	67%
Have graduate degrees	60%
Have been at this church at least 20 years	56%
Not originally Presbyterians	51%
Source: 2024 congregational survey	

Stone Church is blessed to have so many long-time members so active in church life. In many areas of church life, however, the same individuals have carried the load for years, sometimes decades, which has led to burnout. When fatigue takes hold, innovation is a challenge, and new ideas are slow to gain traction. Institutional memory is not being balanced with new perspectives, and opportunities for mentoring and succession planning are being missed. This underscores the urgency of examining how we are organized and inviting new people into leadership in a way that is welcoming, accessible, and sustainable.

2024 survey findings on members’ level of church participation	
8 hours / month or more*	43%
Members who reported same or more participation in recent years	65%
If their participation increased, reason was accepted new office or responsibility	68%
If their participation decreased, reason was retirement or aging	44%
* including Sunday worship	

Listening session participants also said our visibility in the broader community has diminished. Without a clear and consistently articulated sense of purpose, the congregation is left wondering how to define itself in this new chapter. Members expressed a desire for clarity around what Stone Church stands for now, how we are distinct from other congregations, and how we intend to live out our mission in ways that are faithful, relevant,

and energizing. This ambiguity around identity makes it difficult to attract new members, forge strong community partnerships, and move forward with collective purpose.

While our traditional worship service is beloved by many and appreciated for its professional quality and theological depth, there are some concerns about how it might be made more emotionally connective and relevant to a wider range of participants. Some listening session participants expressed a desire to explore ways of enhancing spiritual engagement without losing the excellence and tradition that make the service meaningful.

Additionally, the existing committee structures are seen as too complicated and burdensome, creating barriers to new engagement and sustained energy. There is also a sense that our ministries operate in silos — a term that refers to separate areas or groups functioning in isolation from one another — which was a concern the Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow cited at the end of his three-month temporary pastorship in 2024. This lack of integration limits collaboration and prevents a more unified, holistic approach to ministry. It also makes it harder for new people to find entry points and for existing members to feel connected across the full life of the church.

## WHEN WE ARE AT OUR BEST

The first question we asked participants in our listening sessions was open-ended: “When has our church most been like a church should be?” The 61 answers we received can be found in 3½ single-spaced pages of **Appendix B, Page 46**.

Nearly all responses, though, contained an element of community. Nobody joins a church to be a loner. Nor does anyone join who feels unwelcome.

As one participant succinctly put it, “Our best times have been when church school is full.” That also came through in responses to the congregational survey’s more narrowly focused questions. Two of every three respondents cited Sunday morning services — our most frequent community act — as the single most important determining factor in their commitment to remaining part of our congregation. A close second was that our members’ friends are here.

Beyond Sundays, most of the things that brought people together coalesced around four communal activities: 1) When we show up to help each other in times of trouble, 2) When we share times of joy and celebration in social events, 3) when our children and youth ministries were rallying points for them and their families, and 4) when we united to act with compassion and justice on project causes like hosting rotating homeless shelters, preparing Roycott House for our refugee family, and for LGBTQ+ rights. One of the ways we try to enable full participation within our congregation is to provide American Sign Language interpretation for worship, committees, and other events.

Ranking what attracted members to Stone*	
1-2. Sunday worship & Pastor	52% tie
3. Filled spiritual need	47%
4-5. Social activism & It's Presbyterian	42% tie
Ranking what keeps members at Stone*	
1. Sunday worship	68%
2. Friends are here	64%
3. Fills spiritual need	61%
4. Inclusivity	48%
5. Music program	45%
* Respondents could give multiple reasons Source: 2024 congregational survey	

One member made the connection between welcoming others and specific activities said Stone “was most like it should be when she first arrived and we had a big youth group and people were being invited to get involved. A church is only as strong as the strength of the relationships among members.”

In our listening session with youth, what made them proud to be members was participating in community service projects such as helping with the women’s shelter and the Crop Walk. What made them feel happiest when they got together was to be surrounded by as many of their friends as possible. The session with young adults produced very similar responses. Many of their best memories were youth group Habitat for Humanity work trips and similar projects, and they were thankful for older adults at Stone who took a genuine interest in them, serving as mentors, extended family, and spiritual companions.

## WHAT FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS

**T**he Jesus that Stone Church members talked about in all listening session groups and in their responses in the congregation survey was, above all, a loving person who demonstrated that love in the way he related to and treated the people he encountered in his life and ministry.

Rather than defining what following Jesus means, one adult listening session participant said that's best defined by how others perceive us, using the title of a 1960s song written by a Catholic priest in Chicago: "They will know we are Christian by our love."

The strongest themes to emerge from those sessions around what it means to follow Jesus and the question about what our church is called to be in this moment were focused on love and acceptance, demonstrated by helping the less fortunate and through our support of, and outreach to, the community.

For 82% of our members surveyed, this means social justice should be at the heart of our ministry. But we found that being loving people incorporates more than how we relate to and treat those who are marginalized. It begins with how we treat each other, and it extends to our neighbors down the street and those we don't know but who may venture into our midst on a Sunday morning.

Following Jesus means "walking your talk," people said. It means being a community that works and sings in harmony. It means recognizing that the church does not currently reflect the diversity of the community and that we should embrace inclusivity, a particular theme in the youth listening sessions.

The late June Tablak, for whom our social hall was named and who was the "Churchmouse" columnist in the now discontinued StoneNews newsletter, was cited by numerous members in listening sessions for the way she made every visitor feel welcome. The experience of first-time visitors was addressed in a specific listening session question and responses reflected a broad philosophy of making them feel welcomed, included, and informed about the church's activities.

"I would like a first-time visitor to have met and had a real conversation with at least one person," one participant said.

## WHERE FOLLOWING JESUS WOULD TAKE US

**N**ot to over-simplify, but following Jesus would take our church where most people would like it to go: Engaged with, and vital, to the community that surrounds it. To one listening session participant, the test for whether we were successfully following Jesus would be “if our church were to vanish, would it make any difference.”

The heading for this section is a combination of two questions asked in our listening sessions. One had to do with what our church would look like that shows we understand our community. The other asked what our church would look like if we were singing in harmony, or “hitting on all cylinders.” The answers revealed common misconceptions about our community, and why that, rather than intent, may hamper us in getting to where Jesus leads.

While the adult sessions revealed a near universal ambition to be more diverse, there was also a concern — expressed in one participant's worry — that “we can’t create diversity where we can’t find diversity to add.” Yet our youth sessions produced comments about a desire to invite their school friends, but they were uncomfortable doing so because our church isn’t as diverse as their classes.

The enrollment data for Willow Glen’s neighborhood schools, including Willow Glen Elementary, Middle and High schools — each located within blocks of the church — confirms that they are more diverse than Willow Glen’s Stone Church.

<b>Diversity in Willow Glen Schools (closest to Stone Church)</b>			
	<b>White</b>	<b>Free meal eligible</b>	<b>English learners</b>
Booksin Elementary	45%	15%	7%
Galarza Elementary	4%	89%	44%
Willow Glen Elementary	26%	39%	22%
Willow Glen Middle	32%	41%	20%
Willow Glen High	31%	39%	15%
<i>Source: San Jose Unified School District</i>			

The listening sessions revealed a belief that we would be more racially and culturally diverse, and the church would be engaged with the community, if we participated more frequently in community events, not just our own events. Along with a need to better publicize what we do in the community, our active presence in the community would help us be recognized as a benefit to the community.

But some participants also recognized that diversity extends beyond demographics to the realm of ideas, which includes new ideas that arise from within our congregation. This would require actively engaging younger and newer members in discussions, planning and leadership.

Several participants also said we should offer more programs for youth and young families based on their needs for support, not our need to be supported.