



# Stone Church of Willow Glen

## Mission Study

October 10, 2022

## Introduction

The Mission Study Team consists of the Session/Congregation approved Pastor Nominating Committee members. There are seven ordained Elders, Neale Barret, Bob Fraser, Brian Gustafson, Judi Kaiser, Wendy Lord, Judy West, and Leland Wong; one youth member, Morgan Lord, who is an ordained Deacon; and one Ruling Elder, Carrie Giorgianni. We feel we were nominated because we represent the various elements of Stone Church that make us who we are as a congregation.

Our approach to this Mission Study has been to solicit input from staff, all committees, previous reports, and recent surveys from the entire congregation.

We continue to meet the needs of our congregation through the ongoing changes precipitated by the pandemic, the abrupt change in our leadership, and cultural discontent.

## History of Stone Church

Founded in 1946, Stone Church of Willow Glen is a Presbyterian (PCUSA) member congregation with a delightful congregation located in San Jose's Willow Glen neighborhood. Its members share a strong belief that Christian life demands a practical affirmation of Christ's love for humanity through feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and housing the homeless. With a healthy distribution of ages, a long history of working well together in ministry and mission, we stand for welcoming, inclusiveness, community service, and social action. We cherish the broad sense of inclusiveness that Stone offers, welcoming and respecting a variety of cultures, lifestyles, faith practices and beliefs.

In many ways, the construction of the Stone Church building reflects who we are. The stone mason who worked on the building is said to have slept with the stones to discern where they should be placed. And the stones continue to reflect our steadfast approach to living our faith with compassion, love, and a welcoming heart.

We have a long history of being socially active - we sent a Pastor to march with Dr. King in the early days of the Civil Rights movement; we have sponsored refugee families; and we have hosted numerous rotating Homeless Shelters over the years. As symbols of our action, we display the Rainbow flag, the Black Lives Matter banner, and the Torture is Wrong banner. We continue to look for ways to put our beliefs into action.

Perhaps the activism pursued longest by Stone has been the search for justice for LGBTQ+ folk. Within the PCUSA, there was disagreement over the right of all members to be ordained. In 1978, Stone became part of the "loyal opposition" when our denomination's General Assembly passed "definitive guidance" making ordination dependent on a person's sexual orientation. For the next 30 years, Stone Church members worked to reverse that action. Publishing our Covenant of Dissent was part of that work. It was fitting that when the

General Assembly met in San Jose in 2008, it took the first vote to make all members eligible for ordination that ultimately resulted in amending the PCUSA's Book of Order – our constitution.

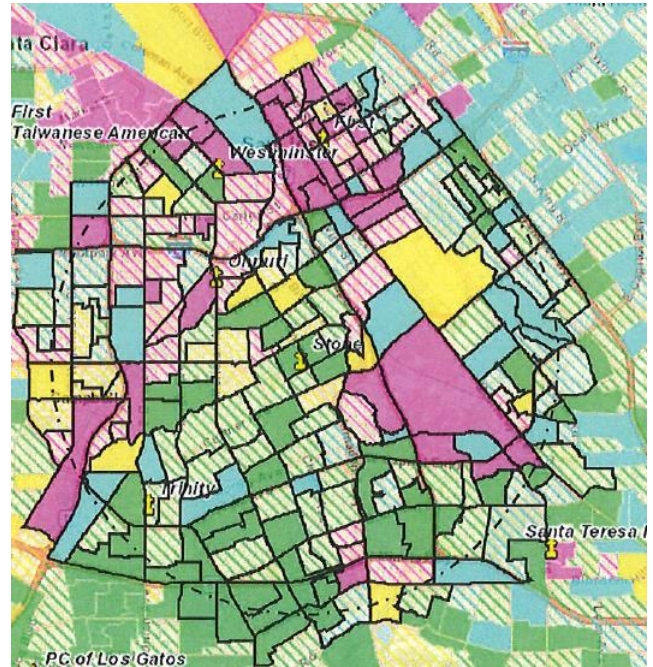
## Who we are

### Our Congregation at a glance

Demographics: Our current membership is 320, which is down slightly from a few years ago. Average weekly attendance is around 90 but that number doesn't include online participation. Education levels are high – over 47% of members hold advanced degrees, and firmly refuse to let them go. We are predominately white (over 93%). Over half the congregation lives within 3 miles, and over 80% live within 8 miles from the church. A recent demographic study of the area fits with these numbers. In general, surveys indicate we'd like to increase our diversity, both racially and socially, but that remains a challenge in practice.

People visit Stone Church for a variety of reasons – location, stance on social issues, the deaf community ministry, traditional worship service, quality music and choir – and stay for the same reasons. Stone Church has a history and a culture of involvement, not only regarding social issues, but involvement of lay leadership in the day-to-day running of the church. We highly value that characteristic and think it's another reason visitors decide to become members.

Demographics of Willow Glen: Willow Glen is a district of San Jose, known for beautiful neighborhoods and a bustling, active main street area. The physical neighborhood around Stone Church is a small part of the area served by the church. The population of the area in a radius of 3.5 miles is approximately 412,000, while according to a 2016 Santa Clara County report, the Willow Glen area itself has a population of around 27,000. According to a demographic report from the Presbytery of San Jose, 56% of the population in the greater area reports as “unclaimed”, meaning those people have no claimed religious affiliation. More information can be found in the Presbytery of San Jose report link in Appendix B.



### Session and committee structure

The Session Elders are nominated by the Nominating Committee, elected by the congregation, and serve 3-year terms. In addition, there is a youth elder, also elected for 3-years. Currently we have a total of 18 Ruling Elders serving.

## Committee structure

- Budget & Finance (B&F) – provides budgeting and financial coordination, guidance, and oversight, and where necessary, recommendations to Session. B&F also chairs the annual Budget Review process.
- Buildings and Grounds (B&G) – cares for and maintains the physical property of Stone Church.
- Christian Education (CE) – Spans from young children to adult education and seeks answers to the questions “What am I to be?” and “What does it mean to follow Jesus’ teachings as a committed disciple?”
- Membership and Communications (M&C) – seeks to provide a welcoming and caring church community. M&C includes our Health Ministry that provides a ministry to the whole person – body, mind, and soul. Also, our Deaf Ministry and Stephen Ministry both come under the umbrella of M&C.
- Nominating Committee – serves to nominate spiritual leaders, elders, and deacons, for the congregation.
- Personnel and Administration (P&A) – provides personnel and administrative services.
- Stewardship – seeks to provide an effective stewardship interpretation and education program for the congregation.
- StoneWorks – serves as the mission arm for the congregation. Promotes, encourages, and supports the mission activity of the church and its committees. Men’s Ministry and Mission is a related, separate mission group.
- Worship – oversees the aspects of worship that do not fall under the purview of the pastoral staff.

## Deacons

Stone Church Deacons are a dedicated group of members who provide activities for varying age groups, visit the homebound, pray for those facing difficulties, and provide meals, rides, and other services as needed. Currently there are three youth deacons serving. Deacons are the caring arm of Stone Church, evidenced by the thanks, personally expressed by members who received rides to treatments and doctor visits, meals, cards, and prayers. The mostly hands-on, face-to-face work of the Deacons has been markedly changed by pandemic limitations, requiring creativity and ingenuity to come up with alternative ways of interacting. The normal home visits were sometimes limited to phone calls and cards. Increased outreach to members through the Card Ministry, utilizing the prayer chain and visitation lists, was done to let our most vulnerable members know we are thinking of them. Deacons greeted worshippers on the Sundays when we returned to in-person worship at the church. Deacons are also an integral part of getting communion to shut-ins, which was interrupted by COVID protocols, and we look forward to starting that again.

## Staff

The staff of Stone Church has a (currently) full time Interim Pastor / Head of Staff and a full time Associate Pastor (currently on sabbatical). All other staff positions are part time. These include Parish Associate, Office and Facility Manager, Church School Administrator, Treasurer, Choir Director, Children’s Choir Director, Organist, ASL Interpreter Coordinator, Nursery Supervisor, and Custodians.

## What we do at Stone

### Worship and Music

Worship and music are central parts of what makes up the dynamic essence of being at Stone Church, in addition to being the initial impression for visitors and newcomers. We continue to grow, adjust, and create a safe spiritual space for all who come to worship. Like stones that are unique in the way they are formed, we welcome the unique qualities of those who come to us, believer, non-believer, and those who challenge our

way of thinking. We have adjusted to the pandemic by offering a traditionally structured hybrid<sup>1</sup> model for Sunday morning worship, all special Lenten and Advent services, and a Thanksgiving Interfaith Service. We also offer Taizé services that attract community and congregation the first Tuesday of the month and every Tuesday during Lent and Advent.

The music program continues to be an integral part of most worship services with its dynamic selections of anthems sung by a volunteer choir of about 35 adults. We make use of talented musicians from inside our congregation, provide opportunities for our children's choir, and occasionally tap into special musicians from outside the congregation. We recently hired a new, skilled organist/pianist, adept in various styles of music and accompanying singers and musicians. But wait, there's more!

- Liturgical Arts stitchers have provided glorious banners for the sanctuary.
- Flowers continue to adorn the retable on Sunday mornings with special arrangements for Easter and Christmas.
- American Sign Language interpreters are part of worship services and also attend committee meetings where needed.
- Ushers for Sunday morning services do all the things that ushers do before and after the service.
- The Care Choir – a small choir who sing for those who are shut-ins further extends the choir mission.
- Elders and Deacons form teams to distribute Home Communion Services, as needed. Unfortunately, this was suspended during the pandemic, but we hope to restore this meaningful service soon.

## Christian Education

Christian education at Stone Church has traditionally proceeded along relatively separate paths from childcare, children, young adults, and adults. Some of these tracks change as quickly as children grow. While probably doing as well as any other church, we're always chasing change. The changes to Christian Education might be characterized as an evolving respect for fulfilling developmental needs at all levels rather than promulgating traditional dogma. All these elements must constantly attend to shifting needs while being careful not to pander to transient fashion.

One trend we might confidently predict is that educational topics will continue to follow Stone Church's commitment to social activism. In the children's program, we continue to find great benefits in the practical application of education. For example, during a lesson on God's work, culture, and ecology, the children planted corn, beans, and squash – crops similar to those planted by Indigenous peoples who came before us. We expect, in a changing world, such attention to how we fit into a larger scheme, becomes ever more important.

## Adult Education

An adult education program that packed the sanctuary for public presentations by national names a few years ago, more recently has had to put that on the back burner due to high speaker costs. Though the regular Sunday morning Adult Education program has struggled to find speakers, it has managed to maintain a regular presentation program on nearly all available Sunday mornings even during the height of the pandemic. For the last six years, efforts to involve the expertise of members of the congregation resulted in sessions in the diverse areas of Biblical exegesis, social activism, voting rights, meditation, dream work, environmental issues, Alzheimer's education, poetry, faith music, and a carol sing being presented. The program currently provides

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, our hybrid model consists of Zoom and Facebook Live Stream.

hybrid presentations (in-person and Zoom) to include those who cannot or are not yet ready to return in person.

## Bible Study

Though roughly a third of Adult Education presentations include classes that deal with scripture and Bible study, that is not the main purpose of Adult Education. Several groups in the congregation who meet informally work with bible study. For example, Presbyterian Women circle groups and men's groups meet regularly and, among other topics, take a closer look at the meanings of scripture and how it applies practically in the life of the church.

## Children

The focus of the children's program is for children to know that God loves them and that they can use the Bibles' teachings to find comfort and be good neighbors to those in their lives. This year we have been adjusting to small numbers of children in person on Sunday. A particular challenge is finding leadership to lead programs with children and youth.

## Youth

The young adult program offers a place to manage the stresses of a young adult with the support of their religion, youth leaders from multiple generations, and each other. The youth group does well at stressing identity, community, and social action while addressing specific subjects that change as rapidly as the news. They bond through social interaction, seasonal activities, games, adventures, and Presbyterian youth conferences. They serve the congregation with periodic volunteerism and annual youth service. There are three youth deacons; typically, we have a youth elder serving on Session. We have also participated in national Presbyterian Youth conferences. Our young adult program's challenges are finding youth leaders and getting participation from youth due to the workloads of school and after-school activities.

## Fellowship

Stone Church is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. There were three main events that took place the weekend of April 29, 30 and May 1. The Friday Evening Family Campfire was attended by families with young children, many youth, couples and singles of all ages. We gathered around small campfires singing, talking, laughing, and enjoying popcorn, cookies, and hot chocolate. The Saturday Evening program included a historical slide presentation, Karaoke, and a tapas dinner. The Sunday morning worship service was attended by 157 members, a record since the start of the pandemic and close to the maximum the Sanctuary could hold and still observe our COVID restrictions. An old-fashioned potluck lunch was served after worship. Enthusiasm for these events was obvious by the attendance and joyous mood.

Most Soul Feast Women's groups, the Men's Book Group, and Presbyterian Women continued to meet either online or in carefully controlled environments during the pandemic.

A survey conducted in May 2022 showed that the people at Stone have always been, and continue to be, enthusiastic about events that involve food. We long to get together in small groups to deepen and renew personal relationships within the church. More mission projects, bible study and adult education classes were also mentioned frequently, as were workshops to learn a new skill, such as flower arranging, bread baking, that type of thing.

We recognize COVID is still circulating widely and will be with us for the foreseeable future, so church activities will continue to be scaled back and safety protocols followed. In the meantime, we continue planning for more events to provide Fellowship opportunities.

## Mission

The opportunities for mission are around us everywhere we look, from homelessness to inequality to various disasters globally and locally. We continue to face a particularly challenging time for justice, equity, and climate catastrophes. Locally, fundamental rights and freedoms for all are under increased threat. Around our world, war and climate catastrophes make refugee crises more widespread than ever, affecting greater numbers. Stone Church's mission work comes mostly from three different groups: StoneWorks, Men's Mission & Ministry, and Presbyterian Women. All three groups do many different activities to fulfill our mission work. In addition, we faithfully contribute to Presbytery mission such as Disaster Assistance, One Great Hour of Sharing, and more.

### StoneWorks Committee

StoneWorks is one of the mission-focused bodies in the church, and they work to use the mission budget for local mission, general mission of the PCUSA, and global mission. They represent the church's mission in the community, through partnerships with service organizations supporting core, critical needs like housing, food and nutrition, social and racial justice work, and education assistance. This past year the committee has worked to increase its action and activity in the community on several important issues headlined by the Bay Area's affordable housing crisis, Native American advocacy, and justice and equity for all. Late last year they partnered with PACT (People Acting in Community Together) on a series of training sessions to teach us about community organizing and how we engage with directly affected community members. Although we are passionate about stepping into many different mission opportunities it is always a struggle to find volunteers to lead, work and attend to our many activities.

One project spanning the last 5 years is accompaniment. We accompany community members who are directly impacted by unjust immigration policies. About 10 percent of our congregation has participated in one way or another to support people who are in trauma when they or a family member are navigating deportation or containment due to immigration status. Some of our congregants have been trained by the Rapid Response Network to come to a home or workplace immediately to report ICE activity anywhere in our county. We sponsored one family for a year whose father was being detained and eventually deported. The family received help with rent, registering vehicles, applying for housing aid, tutoring for the child, as well as interpretation and support.

### Men's Mission and Ministry (MMM)

Men's Mission and Ministry has the goal to show faith in action, for example by using their building skills to help others. They have formed groups to help on construction projects at their mission partner's sites, in addition to helping on repairs and maintenance to Roycott House. They hold various (and often tasty) fundraisers during the year, and use the funds raised to assist their mission partners - a local Christian camp (Daybreak Camp); our local Presbyterian camp (Westminster Woods); a local family assistance organization (Donaldina Cameron House), and a local chapter of a national community assistance organization (Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley). Ten percent of funds raised go back into church funds allocated to support our youth groups. There is also a Men's Book club.

### Presbyterian Women (PW)

Presbyterian Women is a national organization within the PCUSA. They support the mission of the church worldwide, work for justice and peace, and seek to create an inclusive, caring community of women in the PCUSA. Our group gives monetary gifts for scholarships, mission projects, hunger programs, gift cards and items purchased for those in need. They also give goods and services to those in need such as the Little Dresses for Africa project, a prayer shawl ministry, baby blankets and hats, and layette packages for visiting nurses.

## A Culture of Involvement

We have a very strong and capable church, and our members are active in many community programs in support of a variety of mission activities. Our mission partnerships are stronger than ever, all of which put us in great position to make a meaningful impact in support of our community this year and beyond. In addition to the partnerships and programs already mentioned, here is a partial list of activities, programs, and groups that Stone Church members participate in:

- A large group of members stand against Human Trafficking on the 4th Monday morning each month.
- Sacred Heart Community Center – provides essential services for our community and works to provide economic and racial justice
- Second Harvest Food Bank
- Recovery Café – for those traumatized by addiction, homelessness, and mental health challenges
- ASL interpreters – part of our Deaf Ministry
- Public Health Nurses – the Prayer Shawl Group contributes handmade baby hats and blankets.
- Lifted Spirits Homeless Women’s Outreach – the Prayer Shawl group contributes scarves and hats.
- School volunteers – provide tutoring and support for our local high school. Interrupted by COVID, but hopefully able to resume soon.
- Faith in Action for Indigenous People – supporting local tribes with public policy support
- Nina Angels Academy – founded by a congregant, a non-profit, co-ed secondary and high school in West Africa
- Habitat for Humanity – work groups collaborate to build and maintain sustainable housing.
- Women’s shelter – we housed medically fragile women for a month, once a year, pre-pandemic.

## Finances

We base our annual budget on pledges received during the Stewardship campaign in the fall, and we use what funds we have to support our ministry and our mission. Historical performance has been achieved through careful use of income, and a prudent approach to managing cash and investments. The budget for 2022 is \$613,697 which is slightly up from last year. This year we obtained a significant Synod building project loan to supplement a capital campaign to renovate the church office (Lincoln House), renovate Roycott House, and install an ADA-compliant ramp from the Social hall to the backyard.

We always want to do more, of course, which can lead to vigorous discussion over budgets. Like many churches, we want to do more with our mission budget, but there are times when that challenge bumps up against other needs, such as staff salaries.

## Facilities and Grounds

Stone Church sits on the corner of Clark Way and Lincoln Avenue in the Willow Glen area of San Jose. Our facility consists of the main church building which is in three connected sections – the main sanctuary, a social hall and kitchen, and the original church building, now being used as the church office. Lincoln House, which faces Lincoln Avenue, usually serves as the church office, but is now being renovated. Finally, we have a property behind the main sanctuary – Roycott House (on Roycott Way no less!) – which is also being renovated. Soon we will house a refugee family there. We have only minimal parking (next to nothing really), which means that we use neighborhood street parking, which can be a source of friction with the neighbors. The main building has a basement with rooms used for meetings, choir storage, and other uses.

The Buildings and Grounds committee has a list of short-term and long-term plans that they review regularly. The challenges they face are budget limitations and an aging group of people who are available to work on projects.

## Stewardship

The theme for the 2022 pledge campaign, “Stone Family Moving Forward,” emphasized how we, as a congregation, have managed and persevered through COVID-19. Videos were created to publicize the campaign and the church website was updated to accept online pledges. A total of \$511,842 was pledged for 2022, a 4.5% increase compared to the previous year. The pledge drive for 2023, “Called to Care” is in progress now.

The total amount of pledge income doesn’t capture many of the ways the Stone Church Congregation responds in Stewardship. Throughout the year various fundraisers are conducted with remarkable success. The congregation has a history of enthusiastically responding to needs outside the scope of budget line items. Examples of using time and talent in stewardship include consistent support for Disaster Assistance and Presbytery mission programs, responding to specific local mission work, various fundraisers to repay loans, and assisting with sending members to conferences.

## Where our congregation wants to go

We need leadership to see the issues we face and discern how best to move forward with a clear direction and focus for our church. There are many residual effects from the pandemic that have had an impact on worship, mission, and fellowship. And we are looking for ways to reconnect with one another and re-energize the spirit of our congregation.

We have many groups and committees doing amazing work serving in many important areas, from those in need to maintaining the grounds. Unfortunately, we are a bit fragmented. Each group tends to focus on doing their own work and sometimes that work needs volunteers needed by another group at the same time, constraining both groups. Some groups may lose members because of the frustration of the lack of participants for the activities that were planned. And we recognize that we have an aging volunteer pool, who cannot do the things they used to take for granted.

## Worship

Many families are used to their routines of worshiping from home and no longer engage with the congregation in person. Since we’ve been adjusting to mask wearing, our Choir Director is looking at ways to expand our choir and at the same time create opportunities for fellowship and cohesiveness. The music program is the part of worship that draws in our community and where they see the connection to the liturgy and sermon.

## Mission

We need a Pastor to lead our congregants to do God’s work. Although our congregation is quick to write a check to help many different offerings, it is often very difficult to find volunteers to serve on committees or serve as elders or deacons. Getting to know the congregants and knowing when to gently suggest ways for them to get involved will help lead us in serving the ministry of the church.



## Fellowship

We are looking for a new Pastor who will be vigilant about watching for ways to reconnect. To that end, some fellowship mechanisms from the past might be renewed or re-emphasized. For instance,

- The congregational picture directory is overdue for renewal.
- Dinners and informal gatherings, always an important way to get to know others, have been hindered by COVID protocols that limited our ability to congregate and share a meal and conversation. We hope to bring those back into use.
- We had a member who discovered interesting bits of information about various congregants through her coffee hour conversations and published her findings in a newsletter. She has since passed away, and we find that we miss this personal way of connecting with each other.

## What we want in our next Pastor

We seek a leader who listens, who knows our spirit, and truly cares about the congregation. A leader who is able to relate to living in the everyday world and helps connect that with how we practice our faith. A leader who can speak with understanding and compassion, who knows when to act, when to change, when to pause and wait.

We are looking for a leader who communicates the Word of God dynamically, leading us out of our comfort zones to serve causes, people, and organizations in need of our help. Ability to perform backflips, handsprings, and cartwheels not required, but enthusiastically encouraged.

## Why we want those traits

To some extent the reasons for seeking those traits seem self-evident. As a group of believers in this particular place and time, with change and uncertainty all around us, we seek someone who, with compassion and understanding, will lead us with flexibility, attentiveness, faith, and care. Someone who does not shy away from complex issues of faith and life, and yet doesn't try to sum things up in a simple, trite answer.

## Summary and Conclusion

Isaiah 28:16 says, "Therefore, says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation."

The world has changed. Worship has changed. We now wrestle, like Jacob with the angel, with who we are as a congregation in changing times. We seek to understand the challenges we face today, how we can meet those challenges with the grace, humility, and caring love that has been part of the personality of Stone Church since its founding.

Our stones are a metaphor, a constant reminder of the source of our strength as a congregation. They have stood for 75 years. This congregation is the inheritor of all the building done before us. May we continue to build, on and on, into our future.

# Appendix A

## 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 03/14/1995 and reaffirmed by Session 03/09/2006)*

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.

# Appendix B

## Sources for this study

The framework and flow of this document is based on our review of several other Mission Study reports from the Presbytery, supplied by our COM representative. The committee made adjustments as we created this and saw either missing information, or information that we deemed redundant.

Source and reference materials for this study came from the following:

- 2016 Stone Church Mission Study – materials were reviewed and used where still applicable.
- All source materials from the 2016 Mission study were reviewed and considered, including input from the congregation, committees, and youth and high school groups.
- [Stone Church Demographic Report, 2022](#), supplied by the Presbytery about the area surrounding Stone Church.
- [Membership & Communications Congregational Survey, 2022](#)
- [Congregational input collected by this PNC](#). Thanks to all who provided thoughts, feedback, and ideas about where we need to go.
- From the [Stone Church](#) website
  - [Letter from Session regarding the Black Lives Matter](#) banner
  - [Letter of Dissent on Ordination](#) from Stone Church to Presbyterian Church of USA, 1998

Source documents available on request to [neale.barret@gmail.com](mailto:neale.barret@gmail.com)