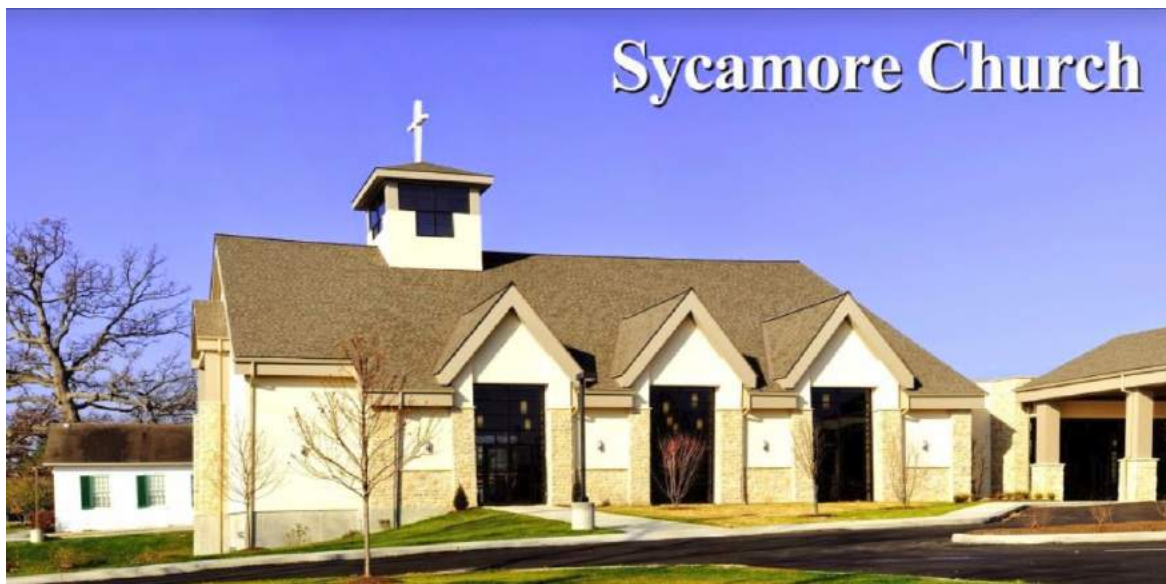


⊕
**INSPIRE.
CONNECT.
SERVE.**



MISSION STUDY FINAL REPORT 2019

SYCAMORE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

Brief Description Of Self-Study Objectives

The objective of the interim time in the Presbyterian denomination (PCUSA) is for a congregation to understand “who they are” and “where they are going” apart from the previous pastor, particularly if that pastor was with a congregation for a long time. A study is usually conducted to identify key elements of their identity to enable them to call a new pastor who “fits” with the church’s character and direction.

This report summarizes the self-study that commenced in late April and was completed in October 2019 for Sycamore Presbyterian Church (SPC) to address both questions, i.e., “Who is Sycamore?” and “Where is Sycamore going?” now that long-term pastor Larry Kent has retired to begin a new chapter in his life.

The study was conducted by the following members (appointed by Session in April 2019) of Sycamore Presbyterian Church as part of a group called “The Mission Study Task Force”:

Holly Roberts, co-chair
Brian Fisher, co-chair
Gordon Fournier
Cheryl Dykstra
Heather Lewis
Valerie Hershberger

The team was blessed to have Ron Cowgill and Valerie Hershberger serve as consultants and provide the Self-Study Framework for this study. Special thanks to Pastor Tim McQuade for his support and contributions.

Self-Study Framework:

The study was structured to investigate the current beliefs and values of Sycamore Presbyterian Church (SPC) within a framework to facilitate both understanding and communication. That framework is organized around three key sections: SPC’s Relationship to God, the congregation’s Relationships with Each Other, and the church’s Relationship to the Outside World. Within each of these were sub-sections, as follows:

Relationship with God

- Theology
- Worship
- Spiritual Practices and Spiritual Growth

Relationships with Each Other

- Social Norms/Culture
- Congregational Care
- Church Organization and Structure

Relationship to the Outside World

- Engagement
- Local Community Context
- View from Outside In

The entire framework is shown below:

Identity								
Vision/Mission/Purpose								
Relationship with God			Relationships with Each Other			Relationship to the World		
Theology	Philosophy & Practices of Worship	Spiritual Practices & Spiritual Growth	Social Norms/ Culture	Congregational Care	Church Organization & Structure	Engagement	Local Community Context	View from Outside In
Church History & Spiritual Journey								

The organization of our report in defining “Who Are We?” follows this framework.

The methodology of our work included conducting a Congregational Life Survey (CLS) on May 19, 2019, conducting focus groups and interviews with community leaders and churches, and analyzing internal church records and external data sources (including census data and data from Percept, a company that provides faith-based demographics and planning tools to churches). Select quotes from the focus groups are included in this report and are written in *purple italic font*. Bible verses (New International Version) are written in *blue italic font*.

We have defined “community” for purposes of this study as the following six zip codes:

Zip Code	City Name or Location
45249	Cincinnati/16-Mile Stand and SPC’s home zip code
45040	Mason
45140	Loveland
45241	Cincinnati/Sharonville
45242	Cincinnati/Blue Ash/Montgomery
45039	Maineville

At the end of this report is a section entitled “The Future,” in which we describe our sense of “Who is God Calling Us to Be” and “Where is God Calling Us to Go?” from this work.

The Mission Study team, with expertise in our current internal and external demographics and knowledge of our current members' thoughts and feelings surrounding SPC, is well positioned to serve as consultants for future endeavors.

This report was accepted and approved by the Session of Sycamore Presbyterian Church on November 3, 2019 and accepted and approved by the Committee on Ministry on November 5, 2019.

MISSION STUDY SUMMARY of “Who Are We?”

- **We Are A Multi-Community Church** of 783 members, located in Symmes Township, Ohio; we draw members from multiple communities including: Mason, Loveland, Maineville, Montgomery, Blue Ash, and Symmes Twp. These communities are largely middle class/upper middle class, as is our congregation. We were founded over 200 years ago as a small Reformed Church and have been in our current location since 1848; our long history is embraced and celebrated.
- **We Are A Church That Prefers Traditional Worship**. We follow Presbyterian traditions in worship and organization and anticipate that newcomers will be comfortable with these traditions. We offer faith, friendship and opportunities to serve according to one’s gifts and interests. We do not seek to become like the newer churches that try to attract those who may be resistant to traditional worship and organizational structure. We see ourselves as another “flavor” of the church and of the body of Christ, one that draws on the richness of tradition for our church culture.
- **We Are An Active, Serving Church**, filled with many “doers,” and believing that we are at our best at “being the church” when we are serving and blessing those less fortunate than we are. We are blessed with a high level of servanthood inside the church. A commonly held value among us is “you get out of church what you put into it”; we expect people to find in serving both fulfillment and a sense of Christian community and spirituality with others.
- **We Develop Community By Serving Together**. Our members who have become involved in one or more ministries have found loving connections – shown by a sense of mutual caring, trust, and belonging – while serving others together. The depth and strength of these relationships are often equal to those in our actual families. Our ministry groups and teams function in many ways as “small communities.”
- **We Are A Peaceful Church**, recognizing that we all come from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives which could divide us, if we choose to focus on differences. We find common ground in focusing on relationships in the midst of serving and worship.
- **We Are A Caring Church**, where many members experience support and help from others, and the Deacons work to ensure that all who need care and support are connected to the church, so no one “falls through the cracks.”
- **We Are An Educated And Generous Church**. SPC members are highly educated relative to the general population. This advanced education level has provided SPC with many professional gifts and talents. SPC is a generous congregation, currently supporting a \$1.4 million budget.
- **We Are An Older Congregation**. Our members recognize a demographic shift within the last decade toward being older. We are eager to become a “whole family” again, for our health as a church and for our mission as the body of Christ in this community.
- **We Are Not An Ethnically Diverse Church**. SPC is not as ethnically diverse as our surrounding community. Some of our members recognize this lack of ethnic diversity and believe we would be a healthier church if we were more reflective of our external community. Our challenge is that we do not know how to move forward on this issue.

SPC Mission Study Details

WHO ARE WE?



"We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" Joshua 9:8

Identity
Vision/Mission/Purpose

WHO ARE WE?

The compelling phrase of “Inspire. Connect. Serve.” was officially adopted by SPC’s Session in spring 2019 to help us better communicate to the congregation and to those in our community. These three core concepts were drawn from the current Strategic Plan and represent our aspirational promises at Sycamore and what God is calling us to do. “Inspire. Connect. Serve.” creates a framework for the promise from the ministries we provide to the members of Sycamore and all of our neighbors.



- **Inspire** – We are inspired to live as disciples of Christ through worship and prayer.
- **Connect** – We connect generations together through study, worship, serving, and fellowship.
- **Serve** – We are called to serve others in Christ’s name.

Vision, Mission, and Core Values

The current **Vision Statement**, adopted in 2013, expresses SPC’s aspirations of what we want to become.

SPC Vision Statement

Seeking to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our Mission Statement, with the Holy Spirit’s leading, SPC will:

- Worship God in everything we do and welcome all to praise and glorify God.
- Transform individuals into empowered disciples of Jesus Christ by helping them identify, develop and utilize their God given spiritual gifts to serve and glorify God.
- Effectively train, equip and develop staff and lay leadership.
- Serve God by actively serving with others in the community doing God’s work and directly serving those who are in need.
- Be a faithful community of believers who hunger for spiritual growth through prayer, instruction, experiential action and small groups, and exude a vibrant and contagious spirituality.
- Be inclusive and flexible, embrace change, and take faith-based risks to meet the changing needs of our church and community without compromising our core values or our heritage.
- Be responsible stewards of God’s blessings, recognizing that ALL we have is God’s. We will commit to financially support the ministry with our tithes and spiritual gifts as well as our labors of love, time and talent.
- Evaluate our current ministries and programs in relationship to our stated core values and establish a holistic organizational framework. We will attempt great things for God that are built on our strengths and resources.
- Evaluate and coordinate establishing facilities designed to support our mission and ministries.

The **SPC Mission Statement**, adopted in 2013, provides a brief description of our purpose.

SPC Mission Statement

Called to be an inviting community where God is glorified, lives are lifted, and Christ's spirit of fellowship awaits.

Mark 16:15

Core Values exhibit the attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and principles that guide SPC in prioritizing decision making, and how we conduct business and interact with one another. We value:

1. **Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior** (*Acts 16:31, Ephesians 2:8-10*). Through faith in Jesus Christ and by His grace, we are saved and called to new life.
2. **Trust in the authority of God's Word** (*II Timothy 3:16; John 17:14-17; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12*)
3. **The Bible is God's Word**, authoritative and applicable to all parts of our lives. We study, teach and follow scripture as our guidebook for life.
4. **Worship** (*Jeremiah 7:1-7; John 4:23-24; Romans 12:1; Ps. 150:6*). We are intentional, enthusiastic and joyful in our commitment to worshiping God according to God's Word. We express our love of God through inspirational worship that challenges the mind, touches the heart and lifts the spirit. Our purpose in worship is to glorify God with our very lives.
5. **Prayer** (*I Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18; Gal.6:2*). God calls us to a life of prayer that is vital to our sense of community. Through prayer, we actively seek the Holy Spirit's direction and empowerment.
6. **Sharing the gospel and spreading God's love** (*Mark 16:15; Philemon 1:6*). We are committed to spreading God's love, empowering people to express their faith confidently and naturally.
7. **A kingdom mindset** (*Romans 14:17-18; Mark 1:15; Galatians 5:16*). God has a significant role for us as a church in the development of God's kingdom. We are committed to having the greatest possible impact for Christ, which will require a constant stretching of our vision and the taking of faith-based risks. Recognizing that all we have belongs to God, we are committed to being good stewards of the resources of time, money and abilities God has given us.
8. **Servanthood as a way of life** (*John 15:16; Phil 2:3-8; Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:1-17*). We are called to serve, to live out the reality of putting others first. We will practice genuine humility as it is the mark of God taking hold in our hearts. We are committed to serving God and God's people everywhere as active participants.
9. **Spiritual growth**, both individually and as a community (*Romans 8:6; Philippians 1:8-11*). We are committed to grow spiritually through worship, prayer, education, fellowship, and service.
10. **Unity forged by unconditional, loving relationships** (*John 13:35; John 17:20-23, Ephesians 4:15; Phil 2:1-2, James 5:16*). God longs for us to be united in spirit and purpose. The Lord intends for us to live life honestly, being truthful and kind to one another. Unity is created and preserved when we are not afraid to admit our flaws and fears and when we are willing to speak the truth in love. We are committed to building one another up in the body of Christ.
11. **Fellowship** (*John 10:16; James 2:8*). We are committed to loving our neighbor and to welcoming everyone into fellowship with us.

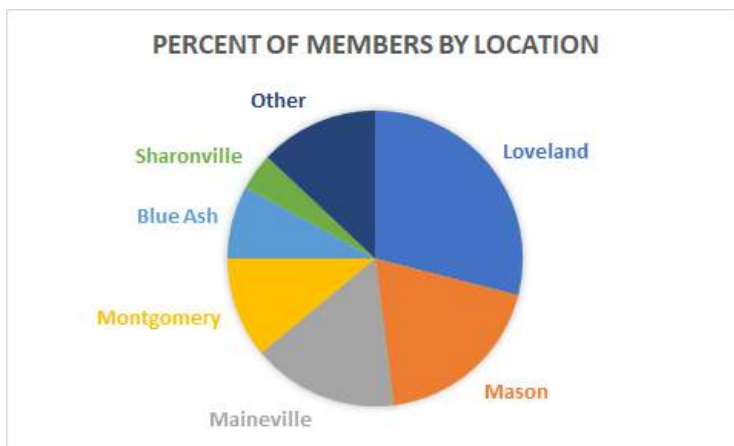
12. **Excellence with integrity** (*Ps. 78:72; Colossians 3:17-23; Proverbs 17:17*). God's work demands our best. Anything less does not honor God. Regular evaluation and review are essential parts of excellence.
13. **Teamwork** (*Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:8-11*). God gives vital spiritual gifts to every believer. The discovery, development and exercise of these gifts are the primary instruments of Christ to minister to His body. We are committed to helping people serve each other according to their spiritual gifts so that all might become mature in Christ. We work together as one team to fulfill our mission.

Location, Demographics, Finances & Facilities

Location

Sycamore Presbyterian Church is located in what used to be called Sixteen Mile Stand, on the eastern side of Montgomery, OH, a Cincinnati suburb approximately 19 miles northeast of downtown Cincinnati. Sixteen Mile Stand takes its name from the distance to Cincinnati via the Montgomery Pike, known today as Montgomery Road and Route 22/3.

SPC is centrally located to four main communities: Montgomery, Loveland, Mason and Maineville. In fact, 75% of congregational members reside in these four communities, with the largest population coming from Loveland.



85% of the members of SPC come from 8 surrounding communities, with the largest percentages coming from Loveland, followed by Mason. The closing of Grace Community Presbyterian Church in 2015, located in Maineville, brought several new members to SPC.

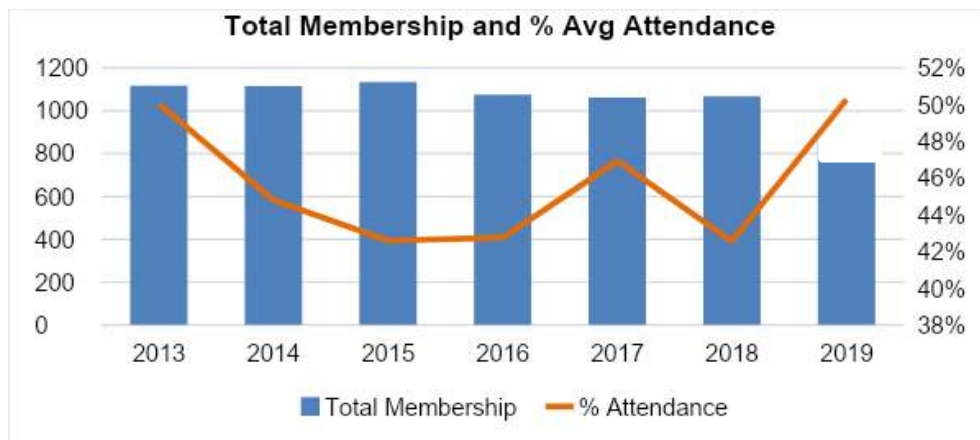
Church Demographics

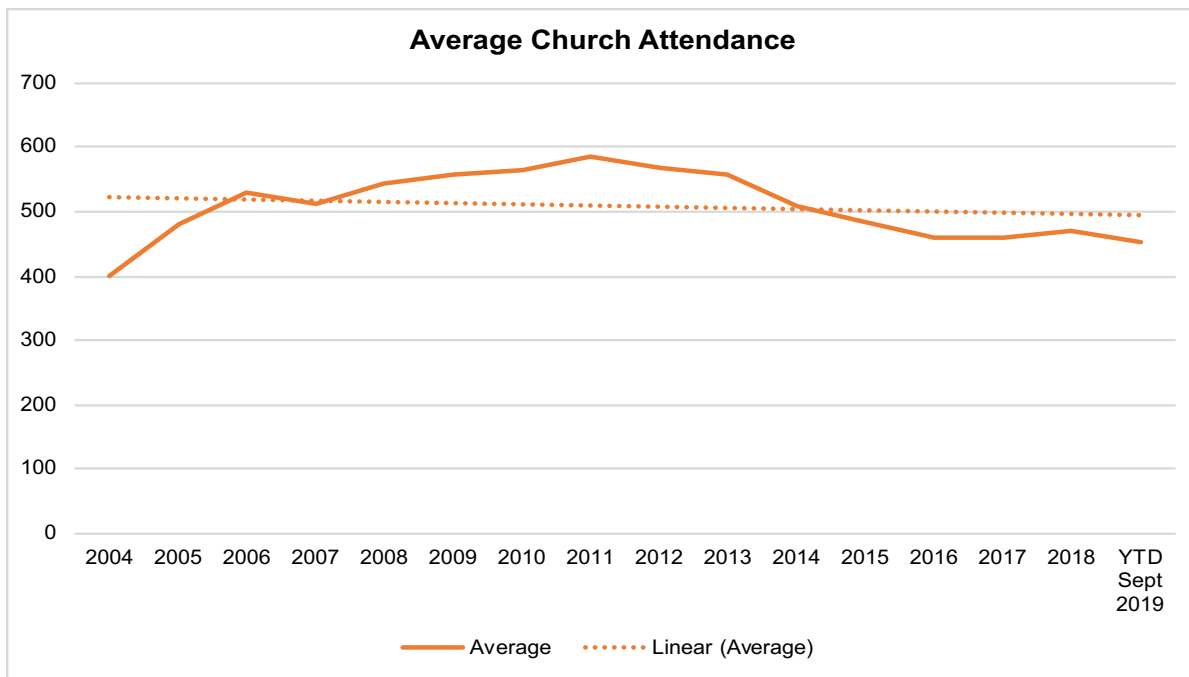
Average church Sunday attendance peaked in 2011 with 587 attendees per week. Since then, attendance has been declining, with an average attendance of 452 per week YTD through September 2019 (including online). Like many other churches, SPC sees increases in worship attendance at Easter and Christmas. SPC also experienced an increase on Dr. Kent's last Sunday on April 7, with an attendance of 740 worshippers. Worship attendance since April has declined from 446 per week in May to 381 per week in September 2019 (including online). Although attendance has been declining, the calculated ratio of attendees to active members has actually increased due to roll review (see below). Some decline after a pastor announces retirement and leaves is typical.

At end of the 2018 calendar year, SPC had 1067 active members. Below is an outline of membership statistics, as reported by the Clerk of Session.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Increases	102	104	69	58	72	77	67	52	56	33	33
Total Decreases (transfer out, death, inactive)	61	29	65	93	18	107	68	35	114	52	27
Active Members	1,049	1,124	1,128	1,093	1,147	1,117	1,116	1,134	1,076	1,057	1,067
Inactive Members	94	69	109	165	167	232	260	260	329	349	330

When the church office transitioned to Breeze software during the summer of 2019, we found that our "truer" membership was 778, and with the addition of most recent new member class, is now at 783. This change in the membership count has shown that SPC's attendance of 50% of active members is much stronger than the 30% average of many churches. This change in the number of active members will impact future per capita assessments (see Church Finance section).

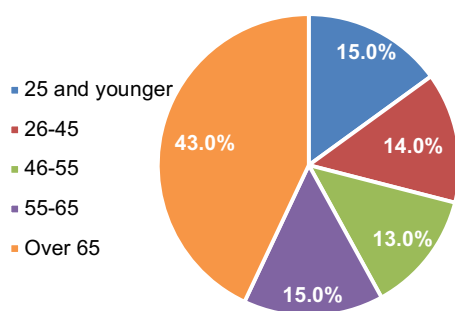




We Are An Older Congregation

On Sunday, May 19, 2019, the congregation completed the Congregational Life Survey (CLS); members not in attendance that day were invited to complete the CLS online. A total of 320 worshippers and 28 staff and leaders (i.e., elders) completed the survey. Data in the following charts were taken from the 2019 CLS and compared to internal church records as of 2018.

SPC Membership by Age (2018)



SPC Membership by Gender



According to internal church records, 60% of the SPC congregation is age 55 or older, with 43% of members over the age of 65 years (CLS survey: 59% over 65).

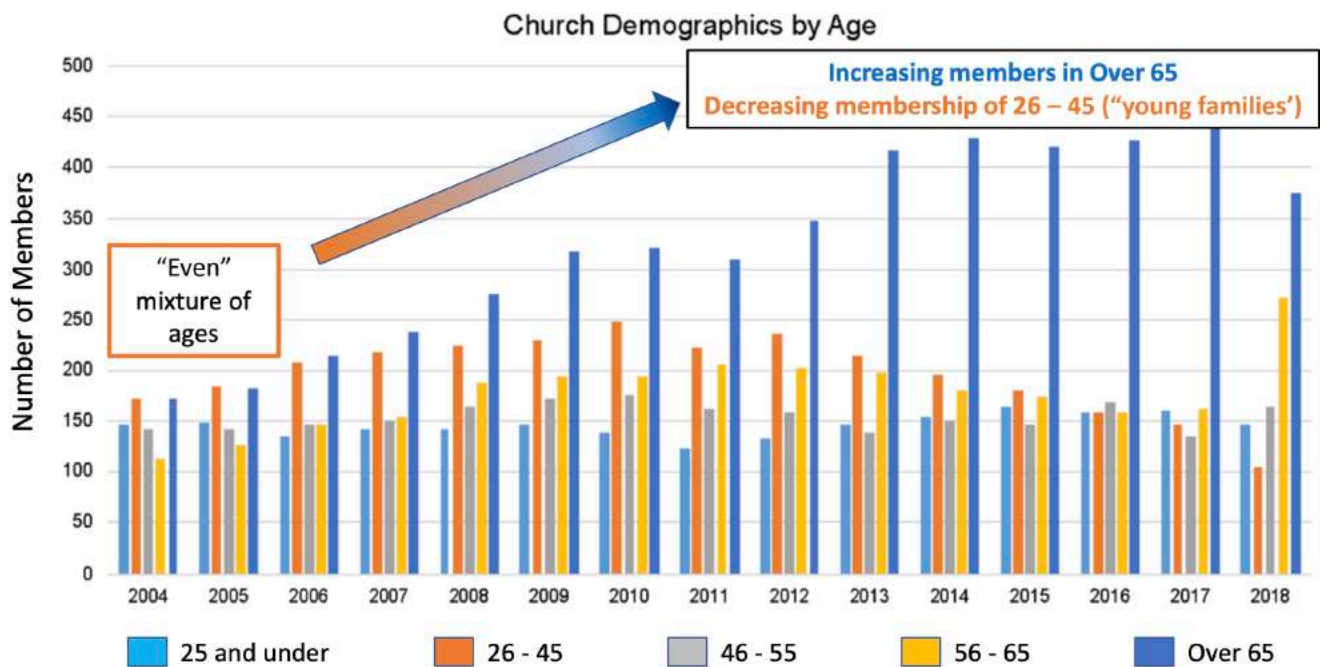
The percentage of female members has been increasing during the last 5 years and females now make up 58% of the congregation.

Church Demographics	CLS Data	Church Office (based on 1067 members in 2018)
By Gender		
Female	39%	58%
Male	61%	42%
By Age		
Up to 17 years	2%	15%
18 - 25 years	1%	
26 - 35 years	2%	42% (14% 26-45; 13% 46-55; 15% 56-65)
36 - 65 years	36%	
Over 65 years	59%	43%

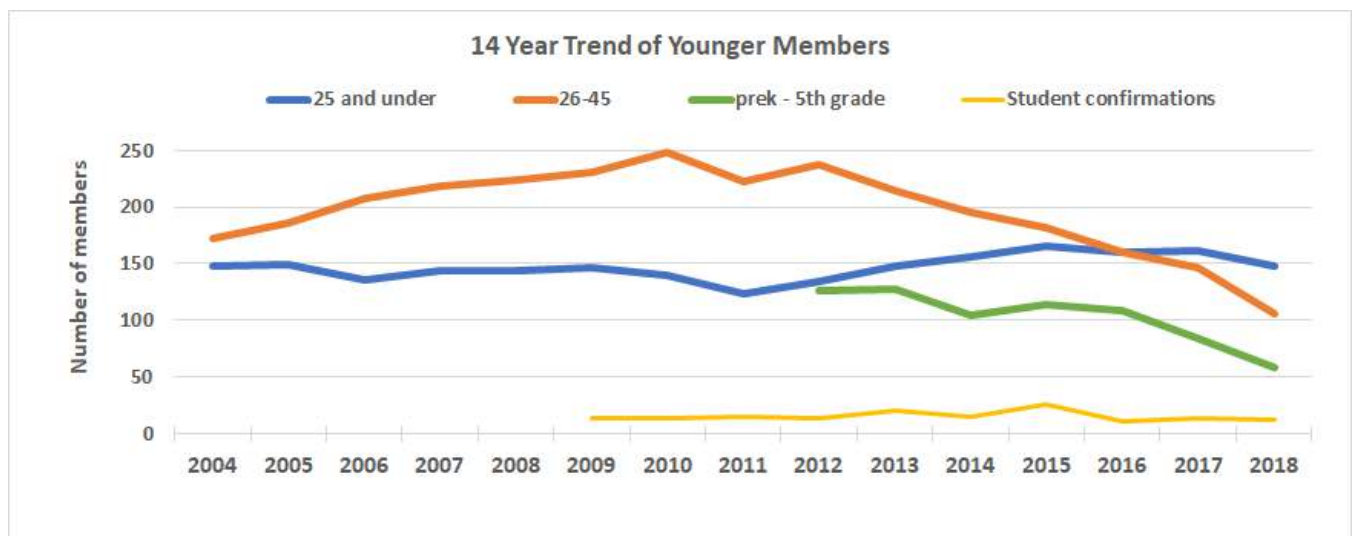
As might be expected:

- 62% are retired
- 28% work full time
- 7% work part time
- 3% are full-time homemakers
- 3% are students

Note: percentages add up to >100% - the survey allowed more than one answer to this question.



Just as important is that we've had a significant decline in the number of adult members under the age of 50 in the last 8 years, highlighted further in the graph below.



The graph also illustrates the loss of young families at SPC, i.e., children under the age of 13 and their parents. Membership of adults age 26–45, as well as Sunday school enrollment, have both been declining. In parallel, the number of children enrolled at the Sycamore Presbyterian Preschool also declined from 2012 – 2017. One positive note is that the number of young people ages 13–25 apparently has stayed relatively flat, which indicates the Student Ministries continues to be a strong program.

The reasons for the decrease may be an accumulation of a number of factors, including internal factors such as staff changes and frequent changes to the schedule and structure of Sunday morning programs, and external factors including more contemporary churches in the area focusing specifically on reaching young parents and families, and the changing demographics of the area around SPC.

As one mother put it in a focus group:

“Not a day goes by where you don’t have somebody from Crossroads, or River’s Crossing, or Horizon...these other large dynamic churches, trying to recruit you. It’s ‘Oh, we have this program, we have that offering, there’s online, there are apps we do all the time, and there’s book clubs and small groups that pop up in the neighborhoods.’ They do really cool fun things that are very, very dynamic. There’s so much out there now to worship to create an experience that fits your family...”

The change in our internal demographics in the last 10 years has not gone unnoticed. Our current members see it, especially on Sunday mornings, and are expressing concern. Some are filled with compassion as they observe the increasing ministry needs of the oldest members who are experiencing the loss of a spouse, serious injury or illness, loss of mobility, or dementia of a spouse. A number of older members are thinking ahead to when they need to “retire” from ministry leadership and wondering whether the next generation of leaders will be there to step in. Some are mourning the departure of their own younger family members who prefer a newer or contemporary church, even as they rejoice in the fact, they are attending worship services somewhere vs. none at all. Many are appropriately alarmed about the future of Sycamore if we do not act swiftly to bring our age demographics back into balance.

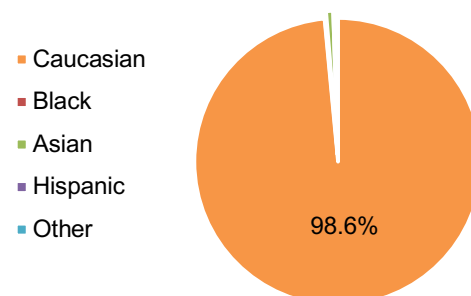
We Are A Church Of Traditional Family Structures

Most members of the congregation are married; 59% live in a household as a couple, and another 14% live as a couple with their children. Of the remaining members, 20% live alone, 2% are single adults with children, 2% live with extended family, and 1% have roommates.

We Are Not An Ethnically Diverse Church

One of the PCUSA’s core values is honoring diversity: “just as the body celebrates its diversity, we celebrate, affirm, and welcome the rich diversity of all of God’s people in our common life.” SPC is not as ethnically diverse as our surrounding community. Based on the most recent statistical report provided to the Presbytery by the Clerk of Session, 98.6% of the congregation is Caucasian, with 0.8% Asian as the next largest ethnicity.

SPC Membership by Ethnicity (2017)



Some of our members recognize this lack of ethnic diversity and are starting to speak up about the need to address it, either because they believe we would be a healthier church if we were more reflective of our external community, or because they believe lack of diversity might contribute to our decline and potentially the failure of SPC to survive into the future.

“One challenge is the changing demographics of the outside community here. A lot of immigrants coming in – very different cultures – and you can see it all over. It’s not a bad thing at all, but it’s an extremely different demographic than what these neighborhoods have been throughout the history of this church.”

“We need to address diversity. We have diversity with age groups, but I’m talking about ethnic diversity. We need to welcome other people to the church somehow.”

“In order for us to continue to grow or maintain, we need more youth and diversity.”

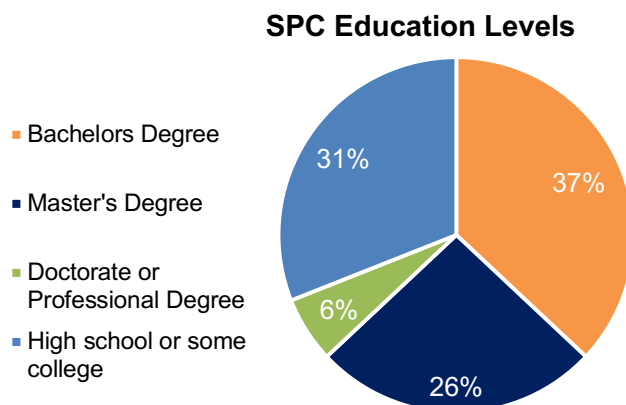
“I feel like one of the reasons nondenominational churches are attractive to youth is because of their diversity and inclusiveness.”

Our challenge is that many do not know how to move forward on this issue. We are not currently equipped to reach out to this new part of the community.

More information on the diversity of the community around SPC can be found in the section of the report titled The Relationship to the World – Local Community Context.

We Are An Educated And Generous Church

With the growing and changing environment, the church, intentionally or unintentionally, has attracted middle to upper middle-class professionals. Sycamore members are highly educated relative to the general population. 69% of CLS survey respondents have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to only 35% of U.S. adults.



Within a 3-mile radius of the church, the overall education level in the area is considered “somewhat high,” because college graduates make up 56.1% of those over age 25 in the area versus 31.0% in the U.S.

This advanced education level has provided SPC with many professional gifts and talents from a variety of industries; this has allowed SPC to instill business concepts, including organizational and administrative concepts, to many programs and projects.

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Additionally, 51% of CLS respondents indicated that they have a pre-tax income of \$100,000 or more. As mentioned previously, 62% of CLS respondents are retired and may be dependent upon pensions and annuities. SPC could see limitations in annual giving, due to potential fixed incomes of some; in addition, more than 39% of CLS survey respondents indicating they give <1% to SPC annually. Based on a study area of households in a 3-mile radius around SPC, the average household income of \$122,700 per year and the likely contribution behavior in the area, the overall religious giving potential can be described as “extremely high,” according to Percept, a company that provides faith-based demographics and planning tools to churches.

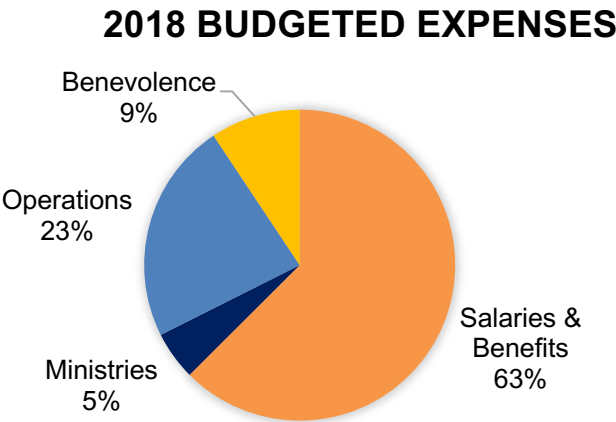
Households by Religious Giving Potential	Average Annual Household Income	Households Contributing More Than \$500 per Year to Churches
Study Area	\$122,700	37%
U.S. Average	\$89,646	31%

SPC is a generous congregation, currently supporting a \$1.4 million budget. The next section will provide an overview of church finances.

Church Finances

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

Sycamore Presbyterian Church currently appears to be in a good position financially. Sycamore has a year-round commitment to Christian stewardship, including the giving of our time, talents and treasures to God’s work. That work also includes the management and execution of an annual pledge campaign for the continuing work of the church.



In the chart, Ministries includes expenses from Family Ministries, Adult Ministries, worship and music, membership and communications. Operations includes office expenses, computer and IT expenses, maintenance and utilities costs, insurance, taxes, and interest, and the denominational “per capita” assessment. SPC conducted a roll review in 2019 that will reduce the per capita assessment in the future. Benevolence encompasses Mission and Deacons work; not shown are non-budgeted contributions to Benevolence, such as proceeds from the annual Lawn Fete fundraisers.

Recent impacts on the financial status of Sycamore Presbyterian Church include payments on the mortgage for a new addition (\$78,584) and additional money toward the long-term maintenance fund (\$30,000). Future needs may include concrete work, pavement of part of the parking lot, and technology updates.

SPC is positioned securely for the next twelve months. However, Dr. James Fischer, Director of Operations, expressed concerns that when a new Head of Staff position is filled, the current level of income will not support the current staffing model. Long-term membership and giving are difficult to predict. Please refer to the Spiritual Practices section for more information on stewardship and giving.

On the next page is a snapshot of the operating budget for 2019 compared to 2018.

**SYCAMORE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
2019 OPERATING BUDGET**

	2018 BUDGET	2019 BUDGET
PASTORAL STAFF	-	
HEAD OF STAFF	161,014	71,679
ASSOCIATE PASTOR/ACTING HEAD OF STAFF	105,715	123,996
TOTAL PASTORAL STAFF	266,729	195,675
OTHER SALARIES	571,101	600,183
TOTAL ALL SALARIES	837,830	795,858
MISC. STAFF EXPENSES	9,148	18,649
CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES	11,833	7,405
STUDENT MINISTRIES	17,306	16,442
FAMILY MINISTRIES	11,835	11,242
ADULT EDUCATION	7,343	6,976
MUSIC	14,520	15,100
HOSPITALITY	5,145	7,500
WORSHIP	4,400	1,600
MEMBERSHIP	509	1,410
COMMUNICATIONS	3,564	3,386
MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS EXPENSE	11,122	15,066
COMPUTER & I.T.	24,922	23,670
OFFICE	25,655	27,334
MAINTENANCE	54,578	64,597
UTILITIES	98,326	91,858
INSURANCE, TAXES, & INTEREST	63,720	57,415
DENOMINATIONAL ASSESSMENT	15,560	33,012
BENEVOLENCE	118,195	116,952
DEACONS	11,820	6,588
MORTGAGE PRINCIPAL	78,146	84,513
LTM FUND REPLENISH	10,000	30,000
TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET	1,435,479	1,436,573

Facilities

Sycamore Presbyterian Church is currently located at 11800 Mason Road in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sycamore Presbyterian has been a part of the Cincinnati community for more than 200 years. The area surrounding the church location has undergone significant changes and growth over the years, moving from a rural agricultural landscape to a suburban one.

The present building is 55,000 square feet, sitting on nine acres of land. The original structure, built in 1848, continues to serve the congregation as a chapel and meeting place. In 1983, much of the current structure was built. The sanctuary at that time is now known as Fellowship Hall and is utilized for meetings and events. The congregation outgrew that particular sanctuary and in 2013, the current sanctuary was dedicated. The quote in the picture to the right is embedded into the new structure.

Student Ministries is housed in "The Underground," the basement under the church. An education wing houses Sycamore Presbyterian Preschool. Sunday mornings finds the second floor of the education wing hosting the children's Sunday School classes, preschool through 5th grade.

Parking of about 500 spots is available on all sides of the church. The current sanctuary seats 600, although the fire marshal allows a total capacity of 880, which would include a large choir in the front. Fellowship Hall has a capacity of 300 people, and its balcony no longer has seating available.

Most rooms, other than staff offices and the current sanctuary, are multi-purpose in function. Fellowship Hall is used for large meetings, Prime timers' luncheons, funeral luncheons, Sewciables quilting group, Student Ministries, and non-church functions. Fellowship Hall, Room 120 and the Media Center are the rooms most often used for meetings. There is also a dedicated area to preserve church archives.

In 2018, several facility improvements were made, including:

- Installation of a new telephone system
- Updates to the media booth and the addition of another remote camera
- Replacement of the entire roof (covered by insurance)
- Implementation of a new church management software system called Breeze
- Reconfiguration of the Narthex for greater visibility for service ministry opportunities and greater accessibility and flexibility for the Café

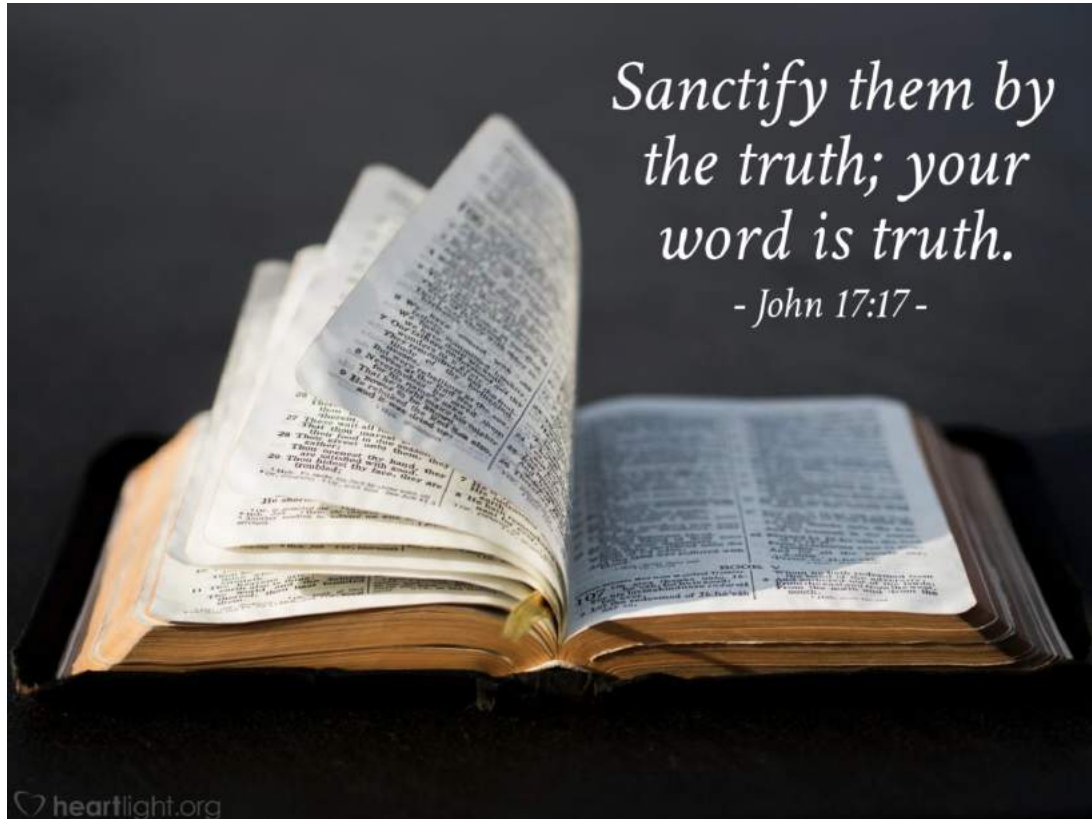


Map Of Facilities

Details of the internal facility of SPC, including emergency response resources for preparedness.



SPC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD



"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light upon my path." Psalm 119:105

Relationship with God		
Theology	Philosophy & Practices of Worship	Spiritual Practices & Spiritual Growth

SPC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Theology And Beliefs Of SPC

SPC holds to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. These fundamentals are expressed in two creeds: The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These creeds were written centuries ago and are still recited frequently during worship services at SPC; the basic beliefs described in these creeds include:

We believe in the Trinity, One God in three persons.

God the Father: The Creator and sustainer of all life

God the Son: Jesus, God's son, both truly God and truly human. Although sinless and perfect, he gave his life so that our sins could be forgiven. He rose from the dead and will come again to make all things new.

God the Holy Spirit: The Holy Comforter, the presence of God with us today

We also believe the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, containing all we need to know for our salvation. God speaks to us through the Bible.

SPC is a member of the PCUSA denomination (Presbytery of Cincinnati and Synod of the Covenant) and follows their polity. As such, our core beliefs are expressed with a particularly Reformed emphasis. At the heart of our Reformed faith is the strong belief that our salvation is by grace through faith; it is God's gift to us, and not a result of our own good works. Reformed tradition also tends to emphasize three themes: sovereignty of God, covenant, and kingdom.

Sovereignty of God: Everything is under God's control. He creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world.

Covenant: God puts himself in a relationship with us and promises to love, care for, and guide us, as individuals and as a community of believers.

Kingdom: God's kingdom, his sovereign reign, is both here now and yet to come. God's sovereignty extends over all of creation and humanity, so that no place or calling is more sacred than any other. The people of God are called to work toward building the kingdom, transforming society by seeking justice, caring for our neighbors and the Creation, and living in obedience to the Word of God. When Christ returns, he will bring God's kingdom in full.

In practice, this means that we at SPC are Christ-followers, seeking to grow in our faith and to transform the world around us by loving our neighbors. It means we hold the Bible in high esteem, understanding it as the inspired Word of God – given not only to show God's plan for salvation, but also for study, teaching, and preaching to build up the community of believers. It means that we at SPC reach out to those who are less fortunate, lost, or suffering and do what we can to make the local community and the world better, in the name of Christ.

Although united in the core beliefs, Christians may differ on some other matters of theology, within the denomination and within the individual congregation. Faithful, thoughtful people seeking to follow God can come to different understandings on various questions. Grace is given to one another on these differences and we choose not to engage in conflict or judgment toward one another.

As one example of this theological diversity, in response to the 221st General Assembly on the W-4.900 amendment on marriage presented in 2014, the Session of Sycamore Presbyterian Church affirmed its understanding of scripture that marriage is a union between one man and one woman in February 2015 (see text box extracted from the SPC website).

This affirmation would seem to align with SPC's self-assessment of our individual theological orientation (in the CLS):

- 51% more on the conservative side
- 38% more on the moderate side
- 11% more on the liberal side

"The future of the church is seeking God, always seeking God. We need to always try to live up to his message. Make it part of our everyday life, just as natural as breathing."

"One thing about being Presbyterian is we don't all have to agree exactly on what we agree on and what we believe. We can have those differences and still have the basic faith and still grow."

"WE BELIEVE THAT THE EFFORT TO SANCTION GAY/LESBIAN MARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH IS CONTRARY TO THE INTENTION OF SCRIPTURE. WE RESPECT THAT SEXUALITY IS AN INTENSELY PERSONAL PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, BUT STILL ONLY ONE DIMENSION OF OUR HUMANITY. WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DESIRES TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH AND EVERY PERSON IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND WE SEEK TO WELCOME ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF ANY AGE, BACKGROUND, ETHNICITY, GENDER OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION TO LEARN ABOUT AND FOLLOW JESUS."

WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT ALL PEOPLE CAN FIND THEIR PRIMARY IDENTITY BY SEEING THAT THEY ARE CREATED BY AND LOVED BY GOD. OUR MOST SINCERE UNDERSTANDING IS THAT GOD'S INTENTION FOR SEXUAL INTIMACY IS TO BE EXPRESSED IN A LASTING COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND A WIFE. RECOGNIZING THAT CONGREGATIONS MAY DIFFER WIDELY ON THIS ISSUE, AND THAT MANY IN OUR OWN FELLOWSHIP DIFFER ON THIS ISSUE, WE BELIEVE THAT WE, AS CHRIST'S PEOPLE, ARE CALLED TO A COMMUNITY LIFE, WHICH THROUGH HONOR AND RESPECT FOR MANY HUMAN DISTINCTIONS AND DIFFERENCES, STAYS CENTRALLY FOCUSED ON COMMITTING OUR LIVES TO JESUS."

Philosophy And Practices Of Worship At SPC

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." Colossians 3:16

Worship is central and highly attended at Sycamore Presbyterian Church. The passage below from the Preface of the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship illustrates worship's foundational importance:

"Worship is at the very heart of the church's life. All that the church is and does is rooted in its worship. The community of faith, gathered in response to God's call, is formed in its worship. Worship is the principal influence that shapes our faith and is the most visible way we express the faith.

In worship, through Word and Sacrament, the church is sustained by the presence of Christ. Joined in worship to the One who is the source of its life, the church is empowered to serve God in the world. Because of the centrality of worship in the church's life, the continuing reform of worship is of primary importance in maintaining the integrity of the people of God. In an age dominated by individualism and secularism, it is particularly important to embrace forms of worship that are firmly rooted in faith and foster a strong communal sense of being united with God, with the community of faith in every time and place, and with a broken world in need of

God's healing touch. In other words, the concern for the reform of worship is, above everything else, a concern for the renewal of the church."

Communal or corporate worship is important to the members of SPC. Our congregation places a great emphasis on worship as they feel God's presence and His renewing power. The services also help our congregants to understand scripture.

We Are A Church That Prefers Traditional Worship

We follow Presbyterian traditions in worship and in church organization and anticipate that newcomers will be comfortable with these. We offer faith, friendship and opportunities to serve according to one's gifts and interests. We do not model ourselves after the newer nondenominational or megachurches; we are grateful for these churches and bless them for bringing more people to Christ. We see ourselves as another "flavor" of church, or segment of the body of Christ, which draws on the richness of tradition for our church culture.

Most of us describe our theological orientation as conservative or moderate. Percept data suggests that those living around SPC also prefer traditional music and worship.

Households by Church Style Preferences	Worship: Traditional	Music: Traditional	Architecture: Traditional	Worship: Contemporary	Music: Contemporary	Architecture: Contemporary
Study Area	27%	28%	30%	26%	21%	18%
U.S. Average	20%	24%	27%	26%	20%	16%

SPC currently has two Sunday worship services at 8:45 and 10:45 AM. Both services are mostly identical and traditional in style. During the academic "school year," both services regularly have a choir and an organist/pianist. On occasions, other music may consist of a bell choir, vocal soloist, instruments (soloist to small group) and children's choir. Christmas and Easter music may comprise a choir, brass, strings, and bells.

"We do a tremendous job in terms of traditional worship, or let's say relaxed traditional worship. I'd like to see that grow because it does not feel phony. You are here and you are here with friends and you're worshipping and singing and listening to a good message. That's authentic to me. It feeds you when you come."

Common elements in both services include:

- An identical message/sermon
- Hymns and worship songs
- Use of projection screen for:

- Announcements at the beginning of service
 - Words for the worship songs during the service
 - Text of the Apostle's Creed for recitation
 - Illustrations/videos to supplement the message/sermon
 - Live views of choir, readings and sermon. These same views are streamed so worshipers may join online.
- A prayer ministry is available after services. Members of the prayer team, called the "Prayer Warriors," sit with individual worshipers at the end of services and lead them in prayer.
 - A "Connect" time at 9:45 between services offers many educational opportunities for all ages. This is a time for fellowship and study.



As times have changed, SPC has tried to experiment with changes. We found that there are few members who long for more contemporary worship.

We Experimented With Different Forms Of Worship

As times have changed, SPC has experimented with traditional and contemporary worship formats, which included holding a different number of services at different times on Sundays (or even on Saturday nights) and in different locations within the church. Numerous attempts were made to hold a contemporary service from 1998-2003. From 2012-2017, the second Sunday services were considered "blended," a mix of traditional and contemporary. A traditional service(s) was maintained throughout this 20-year history.

History of church services from 1998 to present, according to Session meeting minutes:

- Baseline: 9:00 first service; 10:30 second service (traditional format).
- March 1998 – A third service in contemporary style was approved for Saturday nights at 6:00 PM.
- April 1999 – A third service in contemporary style was approved for Sunday starting at noon.
- March 2000 – A children's message was to be included whenever possible in second service.
- March 19, 2000 special Session meeting – approved a summer schedule (9:00 and 10:30 traditional services in the sanctuary and 10:30 contemporary service in Harper's (aka Fellowship) Hall).
- September 2000 – a 10:30 Jubilation [Contemporary] service was mentioned and likely was a continuation from the past summer. A family worship service was to be held every 2-3 months
- August 2001 – Sarah McCutcheon was hired to lead Jubilation worship service.
- April 28, 2002 special Session meeting – The Jubilation service was moved to Sunday evening to attract younger people interested in a contemporary service.

- January 23, 2003 special Session meeting – The “pilot” Jubilation contemporary service was dissolved as it was not meeting expectations. Jubilation service elements were to be incorporated into 10:30 morning services.
- April 2003 – Children were welcomed into all worship services.
- May 2007 – A 3-month trial of a third service was approved for 11:45-12:20 in the Chapel.
- Feb 2009 – Session approved a first service at 8:45-9:45 in the sanctuary (traditional), a second service at 9:45-10:30 in the Chapel (more relaxed in style), and a third Service at 10:45-11:45 in the sanctuary (traditional).
- Feb 2012 – Worship services at 9:15 and 10:45 in the sanctuary (traditional services) were approved. Sometime after this, the 10:45 service evolved into a “blended” service, likely at the discretion of staff.
- February 2017 – Session approved one worship service at 10:00 for the summer (May 28 -Sept 3, 2017) and communion for the first Sunday of each month starting April 2, 2017.
- June 23, 2017 special Session meeting – Session approved a single-service at 10:00 for the 2017-2018 program year.
- May 2018 – Session approved the following Sunday worship model for the 2018-2019 program year: 8:45 first service (traditional including choir), 9:45 Connect hour for fellowship and education, and a 10:45 second service (traditional including choir).

Congregants have differing views of a traditional versus contemporary worship, with focus group participants expressing strong feelings about worship style, and in particular about music style. An interesting trend is that those who enjoy the traditional hymns verbalized personal feelings while those wishing for more contemporary music are looking to attract new or younger members.

“All the contemporary music– people may enjoy it but it’s not great music in my estimation.”

“We have great music, very traditional, very appropriate at lots of different times, but if we want to bring in more youth, not only to Youth Group, but into the church services as well, I think we need to adapt to a more modern sense. Not completely changing – we still obviously need to make our older members happy – but I think slowly adapting to fit the younger generations that are coming in.”

“The old ways of doing worship aren’t bad, but I think it would be helpful to mix in some modern areas of worship just to help bring in other members and grow.”

“Various protestant faiths in this country have gone toward contemporary over the last 40 years. They’ve moved away from the traditional. There’s a great variety out there for people to choose from, in terms of worship and expressing faith. I just see that as a big, big challenge for us to walk that rail in a way that we don’t lose our roots, but we can respond to what people are after out there.

Spiritual Practices And Spiritual Growth

Our church values spiritual growth. In the CLS, 90% of our members said it was “Important” or “Very Important” that they make time to “Deepen my relationship with God.” Many of our members, both older and younger, say they came to Sycamore because they saw it as a place where their whole family could grow.

“Our spiritual home and faith and church have always been important. My wife and I wanted to make sure we grow as a family. Sycamore felt right – the sense of community, what was going on, the growth in the church.”

“So, a lot of what brought us into the church, and it was very, very important for my family, was being able to grow as a family through Jesus Christ, which the church offered.”

The need for continued growth is illustrated in the CLS survey, in which only 27% agreed that “I know the Bible well” and only 49% agreed that “I see myself as a disciple.”

As recently as the early 2000s, the congregation looked primarily to the Sunday morning sermons as a way to achieve this. While there are now a variety of options for continued spiritual growth, the sermons are still very important.

Pastor Larry Kent’s sermons were experienced as “real and relatable” by many in the church, as well as “aspirational” and as messages that “got us thinking.” One person felt the sermons were “counseling sessions on a spiritual level.” One person summed it up this way:

“Every week, I went home feeling that I could take something out of his sermon that really pertained to me.”

Just as important, SPC members have discovered that spiritual growth is often stronger and deeper in community, with a focus on spiritual learning and growth. Members, young and old, describe the blessings of being encouraged and/or mentored by others who are further in their faith journey, of wisdom and insight garnered from group discussions in Bible studies and studies of other Christian books, and of instruction in Christian education classes.



“There are a lot of really strong Christians that I’ve learned a lot from, that have helped me grow in my faith.”

“When my family first joined, I was like ‘okay, let’s go to church’ and then I’d go home and forget all about what happened. Nothing would stay with me and I wouldn’t have a connection with God. But now when I get home, I’ve learned to reflect, and through Youth Group, they’ve taught me how to talk to God more and be better at praying and everything.”

“I went to the first men’s retreat and there was a group of people, some men who cared a lot about men’s growth, and understanding, and learning something about the Bible and substance.”

Now, during this interim time, we are renewing our commitment to adult education and discipleship, led in part by Pastor Tim McQuade, and also by existing groups, such as StoneMasons Ministry for Men.

Consistent with our emphasis on the importance of spiritual growth, SPC offers programs and practices for encouraging and supporting growth among our members:

Sunday “Connect” Time

At the June 2018 Session meeting, a new worship model was approved that allowed for traditional worship and also opportunities for church school and adult education. The “Connect” hour was added in June 2018 to help increase spiritual growth and connection with other members of the church. Several classes are offered for all ages during this time period between the first and second services (9:45-10:45).

Bible Study

SPC offers many opportunities for members and visitors to engage in regular Bible studies throughout the week, which is consistent with our faith-based desire to learn more about God’s story and His call.

Approximately 14 Bible study classes are all well-attended (159 attendees per week on average, including the Connect hour classes in June 2019). Classes are offered at various times during the week.

- **Lamplighters** – meets on Tuesday evenings and is the longest running Bible study class at SPC. (average attendance: 16-22).
- **Men’s Bible Studies**
 - Men’s Bible Study – men meeting early on Wednesday mornings to learn from the Word of God by supporting one another and discussing practical applications for transforming thoughts, actions and deeds to strengthen our relationship with Jesus Christ, serve Him, and proclaim the glory of God (average attendance: 14).
 - Saturday Morning Men’s Bible Study – men meeting for prayer, fellowship and Bible study (average attendance: 8).
 - Monthly Men’s Prayer Breakfast – men meeting the first Sunday of the month for inspiring words from one of our men.
- **Women’s Bible Studies**
 - Monday Morning Bible Study – women dedicated to learning and growing together through study of the Bible and books by a variety of spiritual authors (average attendance: 18).
 - Tuesday Morning Bible Study (twice monthly) – women studying the books of the Bible and welcoming newcomers (average attendance: 14).
 - Wednesday Morning Bible Study – women of all ages who attend SPC or other churches and meet to study, encourage each other, and draw closer to Jesus (average attendance: 8).
 - Harmony Circle is a group of women who come together once a month to strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ.



- **Family Ministries Bible Studies**

- Parents Bible Study – parents meeting during “Connect” time to study and encourage faithful parenting rooted in Christ (average attendance: 5).
- WALK / BABES – high school students meeting weekly to study the Bible, fellowship, and address tough questions and issues that students deal with on a regular basis.

Prayer

The Book of Confessions says “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God in the name of Christ by the help of the Spirit with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies. And we are to pray for all things tending to the glory of God, the welfare of the church, our own or other’s good, but not for anything unlawful.” SPC engages in corporate prayer during worship services, allowing time for personal prayer and reflection, and closing with The Lord’s Prayer. A prayer team, the “Prayer Warriors,” was instituted at SPC in 2017 and is made up of members of the congregation available to pray with those requesting it at the end of worship services. Additionally, SPC has a prayer chain, which allows members to pray for those who request special prayers.

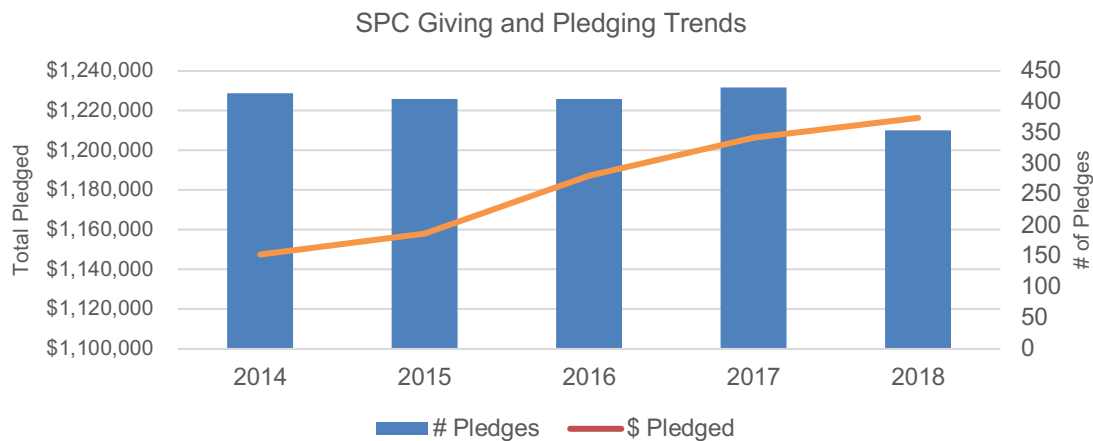
Stewardship

According to the *Book of Confessions*, “Giving has always been a mark of Christian commitment and discipleship. The ways in which a believer uses God’s gifts of material goods, personal abilities, and time should reflect a faithful response to God’s self-giving in Jesus Christ and Christ’s call to minister to and share with others in the world. Tithing is a primary expression of the Christian discipline of stewardship.”

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts 20:35

According to the CLS, although 51% of the congregation reported income of \$100,000 or more, 60% stated that they give 3% or less to SPC. However, it should be noted that the CLS did not ask survey participants about their contributions to other Christian organizations.

Pledges for the 2018 giving campaign (which funds the 2019 calendar year) totaled \$1,216,401 from 354 pledging units. The average pledge for the 2018 campaign increased by nearly 17% from the previous year, likely due to a special ask from the pulpit to pledge more. However, for unknown reasons, there were fewer pledges overall, as shown on the following chart.



When pledges were combined with the weekly loose offerings, the church was able to maintain budget levels from 2018; however, most requests for additional funds likely will not be met for the remainder of 2019.

Sacraments

Consistent with being Presbyterian and Reformed in our theology, we regularly engage in the following sacraments:

Communion or the Lord's Supper: Communion is currently practiced the first Sunday of each month as part of the worship service. Typically, congregants stay seated as bread is served in small cubes on a tray. Gluten-free options are also available. Grape juice is served in small cups in a similar way. Occasionally, communion is served by intinction.



Baptisms: We practice infant baptism as requested by new parents and baptisms of older individuals as a profession of faith, typically when they are joining the church.

"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" Acts 2:38-39

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." 1 Corinthians 12:27

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER



“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35

Relationships with Each Other		
Social Norms/Culture	Congregational Care	Church Organization & Structure

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER

Social Norms/Culture

The social norms and culture of SPC were discerned primarily via observation, conversations, and qualitative research (focus groups). Data were also gathered from the May 2019 Congregational Life Survey (CLS).

We Are A People Of Community

“God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

Members and attendees who have become involved in one or more ministries at SPC have found community: loving connections characterized by a sense of mutual caring, trust, and belonging as we serve others together in the name of Christ. This is shown in comments from focus groups:

“I always felt like the church was the pastor. If I liked the pastor, I went to church. Now for the first time in my life, I know the church is not the pastor. The church is truly the people in it. My life would not be anything like it is now, as rich as it is now, without the people in this church.”

“When we joined, we got involved in the Adult Sunday School, and now we’ve got a family of probably 20 close friends. You need that community.”

Many of us feel that SPC is “home” and “family” because of the deep friendships we’ve developed with other members or the camaraderie we feel when participating in activities together. These relationships are an important reason many of us choose to stay at SPC.

“When I think of Sycamore, I think ‘welcome home’ and ‘family-centered.’ It’s not just children’s ministry, it’s not just youth ministry; it’s not just young people, married people, or parents. But it’s the church family. It’s God’s family.”



Others of us describe the caring support we’ve received from SPC friends in times of health crises and loss (more fully described in the Congregational Care section of this report).

This sense of community and fellowship reported qualitatively was confirmed by the congregational survey. SPC’s greatest strength, according to the CLS, is “Caring Relationships” as shown by the responses below:

- 94% of respondents feel this church loves and cares for all its members (Very Well or Somewhat Well). Within that number, 57% rated the church as doing this Very Well.
- 79% report having at least one close friend in the congregation (True or Very True).
- 74% agreed they have “a strong sense of belonging” (True or Very True)

Leadership and staff also observe and experience this sense of warm, caring relationships, including in their own interactions with the congregation. In the leadership and staff section of the CLS, 88% agreed (True or Very True) that “I observe people warmly greeting one another before or after worship and at other events.” Staff describe this greeting time as “noisy” in a positive sense, since it indicates to them the high level of fellowship among the congregation.



However, our desire to catch up with our friends can cause us to overlook newcomers and people we don't already know. This was shown by comments in focus groups:

“What brought us here were our children. I wouldn't say that I found this congregation to be overly friendly. There were many Sundays where we could come worship and we could leave and maybe didn't speak to one other person.”

“One Sunday I was standing, waiting on my wife, and a woman about my age walked by that I have never seen before. I said, ‘Good morning’ and spoke to her and found out she was a visitor... And she said ‘Candidly, I wasn't going to come back because you're the first person that's spoken to me.’”

Some who have joined SPC in the past decade report that the church was not friendly at first. Thus, we know that not all current members and attendees have found this same sense of community described above. In fact, 43% of CLS respondents agreed that “Sometimes this church feels cliquish and I feel left out” (Very True or True = 14%, Somewhat True = 29%).

One reason for this may be found in the culture and ministry choices of our church and is described in the following section.

We Develop Community Through Serving Together

SPC does not have a formal small-group ministry as found in some other churches, where groups of 8-12 members gather together for food, fellowship, and spiritual nourishment (usually Bible study or service). Instead, we have a culture of meeting each other and building relationships through our service together in ministry. These ministry groups have functioned like small groups in some ways, in that close relationships have formed among group members. But just as important, there is a shared spirit of making a difference together in the lives of others in the name of Christ. This was a theme in every focus group:

“That Outreach Day is excellent. Excellent. It brings back that thought about everybody getting to know each other by going out and doing something.”

“Oh, my, the relationships that came from Lawn Fete! People have said ‘Oh, I'd rather just give the money.’ No, no, no! It's the camaraderie, the working together and sweating and having it come out right, and you earn some money for the church.”

"I've really enjoyed a lot of the various ministries that lead to relationship-building. I enjoy men's ministry right now."

"With Sewciables [a church ministry that makes quilts to give away], I like the fact that we are doing something to help people who are in crisis, or in pain or hurting, but at the same time we have developed very strong relationships among the members of the group."

Interestingly, this has become a genuine expectation of new people who join the church – that they will need to seek out ministries that fit their interests and skills and participate in order to find fellowship and community. Our members clearly articulated these values in focus groups:



"Getting involved in church is so important. You don't just walk in the door and walk out. You need to get into something. Then you feel the love of the church."

One person characterized this as an expectation of "commitment."

"There's a certain anonymity to going to a megachurch. You don't have to make a commitment the way we've all made a commitment to do Sunday School and VBS and be on Deacons and Elders and that sort of thing.... and I think we're still asking people to make a commitment, which is, I think, part of being a person who belongs to a church."

While these values have certainly built a strong community within SPC, they do seem to be different from more contemporary churches and may contribute to the feeling of some that Sycamore is not a particularly friendly church. These expectations also do not take into consideration that there may be people who are interested in SPC and may be prevented from immediate participation due to life circumstances.

We Are An Active, Serving Church

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2:14-17

Consistent with our values about getting involved in ministry, we are both an active church and a people motivated to serve others. Many of us joined SPC in part because of the many activities and opportunities for ministry offered here, from service and mission to Bible studies and youth programs.

"There's just something here for everybody to do. It's just endless. The activities, great people, you can get involved in everything."

Results of the CLS confirms that we have a high level of volunteerism for serving the congregation inside the church:

- 31% Lead or attend a Bible study or small group
- 29% Serve on a committee or task force
- 31% Engage in mission work
- 10% In music ministry

(Respondents could select more than one answer)

Many who are active want to share their gifts and talents to glorify God and serve others. SPC does its best to identify the gifts and talents of its members and fit them into ministries that match those gifts, and an assessment of gifts may allow SPC to do a better job at this. “A church that does gift assessment will likely do a better job at placing people in more appropriate ministries,” according to a report by Living Stones, a consultant group that assisted SPC with self-assessment and long-range planning in 2008.

In addition to actively serving inside the church, we believe that we are at our best at “being the church” when we are serving and blessing those less fortunate than ourselves.

“Anytime we are ministering to people who are in need, whether it be our own members or through IHN (Interfaith Hospitality Network) or Habitat or the Christmas baskets, I think that is God’s calling for us.”

Many of us feel most alive and connected to each other when we work together to be Jesus’s hands and feet in the world at large. A few of the significant outreach ministries that engage members of SPC as volunteers include IHN (Interfaith Hospitality Network), Sugartree Ministries, and Outreach Day, an annual SPC event where approximately 200 of our people go out to assist 10-15 local ministries and nonprofits. There is also a history of members responding to the need of disasters, such as the times when SPC opened its doors and filled the church with clothes and food to care for neighbors suffering after the Blue Ash tornado of 1999, and when people gave generously to the victims of Hurricane Sandy in the early 2000s.



This active, serving culture is also seen in results from the CLS, in which

- 93% of us agreed that the church helps members find the best way they can contribute to the life of the church (Very Well or Somewhat Well)
- 72% of us think it is important to work to improve “my community” (Important or Very Important)
- 86% of us believe SPC responds well to the needs of people outside the church (Quite Well or Somewhat Well)
- 76% of us agreed that we are heavily involved in this church beyond attending worship (Very True or True or Somewhat True)

We are a people of God who want to make a difference in the lives of others and seek out opportunities to do so.

“I love whatever I can do to get involved and serve.”

A congregational survey completed in 2016 as part of Transformation 2.0 revealed that 164 of our congregants were volunteering in 105 ministry areas both inside and outside the church. Many of those serving outside the church were serving in organizations that did not have any connection to SPC.

As with any group of people, there is a continuum of participation; the CLS revealed SPC is least strong in outward focus, or how well we are reflecting Jesus’ servanthood out in the world.

We Are A Peaceful Church

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:15

We recognize that we all come from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives which could divide us if we choose to focus on differences. Some of this is in our individual church histories that include, in addition to Presbyterian, many of the mainline denominations such as Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, and Congregationalist. Our members also speak of the diversity of thought and opinion that exist among us, and how this is acceptable at SPC.

“We’re all different. We all come from different places. We all have different backgrounds. We all have different ideologies, political, religious, whatever. We don’t all think the same. I know in some churches, thinking the same is how you are accepted. But I like that here at Sycamore you can be an individual. You can have different ideas.”

Instead, we find common ground in focusing on relationships in the midst of serving and spiritual growth.

Data from the CLS is in alignment with our peacefulness as a church. Only 6% of us agree with the statement “there is serious conflict in this church” (True or Very True), while most of us, 55%, say that is not true. And 74% indicate that the church “makes me feel that my opinions are valued” (Some Extent or Great Extent).

There is a second aspect of this desire for peace, which is an expectation that the gathering of God’s people will be different from the world, providing a brief time of calm in order to focus on the spiritual, and be renewed for daily life. This was expressed by both older members dealing with difficult life events such as the loss of a spouse, and younger members looking for a moment of peace in the whirlwind of life’s challenges.

“When I was widowed, I needed solace, I needed serenity, I needed God. I go to church to seek calmness. I don’t want the everyday that you face six other days in a week – traumas and world events and discord.”

However, as in any church filled with imperfect human beings, there is occasional conflict at SPC. And our emphasis on “peace” can inhibit our ability to both raise issues and to move forward to resolve them constructively. Some members of focus groups reported that the church struggles to deal with conflict, and 13% of the worshippers agree with the statement that “there are members who have been and are still hurt by this church” (CLS). As with many churches, most of our conflict seems to center around the structure, scheduling, and content of Sunday mornings as we wrestle with how to maintain our fellowship patterns and traditional style of worship, while providing spiritual nourishment to younger generations.

Food Is Community, Food Is Service

One aspect of our culture is that we use food to both help build community and to serve others, and we would like to do more. The sharing of food is often described in studies of Biblical hospitality.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42

Specific fellowship activities around food include:

- “Dinners for 6, 7 or 8” in which congregation members sign up to both attend and host dinners with other congregation members they don’t know.
- Prime Timers luncheons (at the church) with a program
- Singles Ministry lunches and dinners together.
- Youth activities, including the annual fund-raising Pancake Breakfast for the congregation



Perhaps more importantly, SPC has developed the serving of food as a ministry to others both inside and outside the church. This includes:

- Funeral Ministry, where we provide food to comfort those in mourning
- IHN, where we provide food to comfort those in need of a home
- Providing food in support of various ministries, such as Outreach Day, where everyone returns to the church for lunch, and Lawn Fete, where food is part of the overall program

Although this kind of serving is mostly behind the scenes, we have members who see working in the kitchen and providing good quality food as their mission in the church, and they envision more opportunity when the current kitchen can be upgraded.



Congregational Care And Congregational Care Ministries

Our church has a culture of caring for one another. Caring relationships develop naturally within Bible studies, choir, mission teams, and other groups. As various people said in focus groups:

“This church really comes together when someone’s in need or there’s something that needs to be done.”

“I think this is a most caring church; we’ve been through some hard times and people were always right there.”

“I literally feel cheered on all the time at this church. When I was going through all my stuff with my feet, this church really cheered me on and supported me with meals, with phone calls, and cards.”

“I’ve had three family members buried from this church, and each time it has just been so amazing. So comforting, such an outpouring of love.”

The staff and leadership portion of the CLS survey confirmed the congregation’s feelings:

CLS Leadership survey question	Staff/Leadership response
The church provides love and care for members	93% agree
People greet each other warmly at worship	88% agree
The church takes care of members who are sick, grieving, or in need of support	100% agree

In addition, we have a Deacon program that works to ensure that all who need care and support are connected to the church, so no one “falls through the cracks.” Deacons have organized the congregation into 18 SPC Neighborhoods, with one deacon responsible for each neighborhood. Deacons connect with the members in their Neighborhoods in person and through email and cards, and report special needs and prayer requests to the staff for additional support.

Deacons also coordinate funeral receptions, flower deliveries, caring cards, and minister in many other ways. Deacons lead many congregational care ministries:

Bereavement and Funeral Meals – Active Deacons and other volunteers prepare and serve meals for funerals and memorial services held at SPC, helping families feel loved and cared for by their church family in their time of grief. In 2018, this group served more than 500 meals.

Caring Cards – The Deacons send cards or notes to members who are ill or grieving, or celebrating a birthday, to help provide a caring connection with the church and to let them know that SPC cares for them. In 2018, nearly 400 cards were sent.

Cooks on Call – Deacons coordinate this ministry to provide meals to families dealing with illness or a hospital stay. Cooks include Deacons and other volunteers, often within the member's neighborhood.



Deacon of the Month – The two assigned Deacons of the Month distribute altar flowers to members of SPC who are in the hospital or have another special need. They also distribute baby booties from the Knitting Ministry and the baptismal rosebud to new parents. These Deacons are also available before and after services to meet with any member who needs assistance.

Grief Share – This faith-based program uses videos, personal experience, sharing, and fellowship to help ease the pain of grieving for SPC members and others. The specially trained program facilitator is not a Deacon, but the ministry is supported financially by the Deacons and with representation as the Deacons focus on care for our congregation and larger community.



Homebound Ministry – Deacons visit homebound members and serve communion to them each time communion is served in the sanctuary. Deacons also send Sunday bulletins by mail to homebound members who want to keep in touch with church activities that way.

Knitting Ministry – This group provides handmade prayer shawls to members who are ill or grieving, baby booties for SPC newborns, and numerous other knit gifts to charities supported by SPC.

Medical Response and Supply Team – SPC's medical team provides medical personnel during each Sunday morning service in case of a minor medical problem. This group also provides SPC members with in-home medical equipment such as crutches, wheelchairs, and shower stools.

Staff Luncheon – The Deacons provide a holiday lunch to the staff and church volunteers to thank them for their faithful service throughout the year.

Veterans' Care – The Deacons honor and support SPC veterans by providing several veterans' activities per year: lunches, a Veteran's Day program, and other social events.



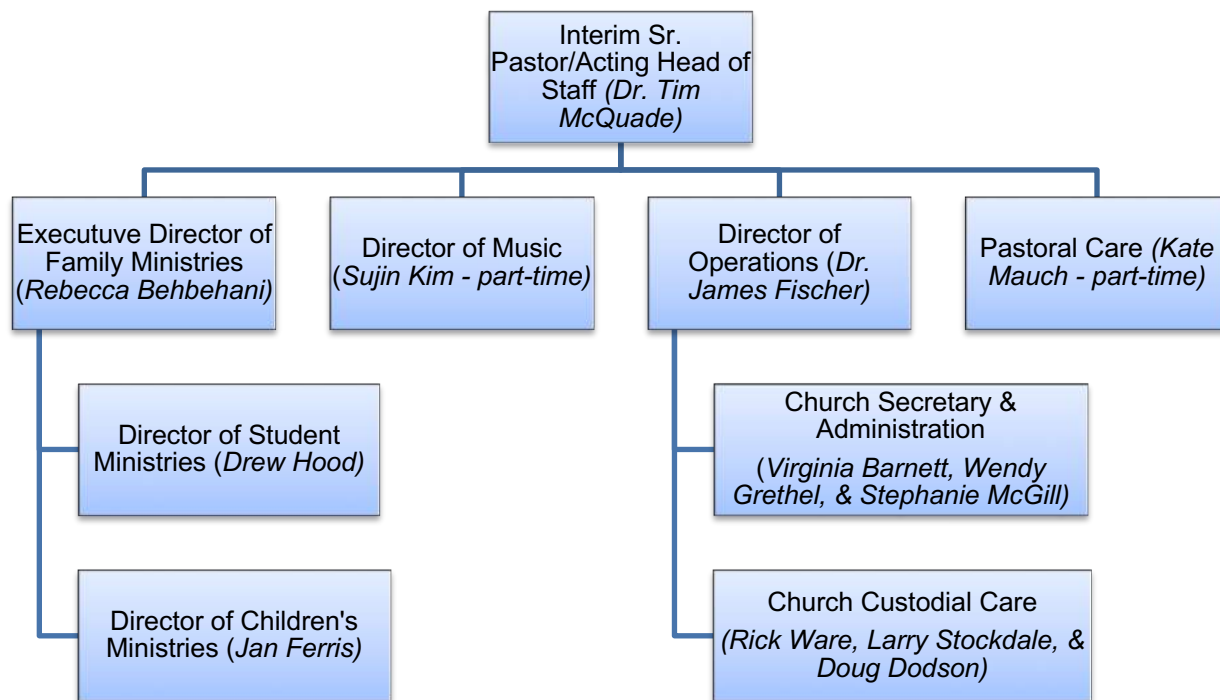
Deacons also provide support and participate in many other SPC activities: numerous committees, the annual Ministry Fair, the Missions Committee Christmas basket program, Children's Ministry scavenger hunt, and others.

Although not under the Deacons' sponsorship, DivorceCare was recently offered at SPC. DivorceCare is a faith-based program that helps participants face the challenge of divorce and move toward rebuilding their lives. This program was introduced in winter 2018 and two classes have been provided to congregants and those in the Cincinnati community.

Church Organization And Structure

The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Bible, from the Greek word for "elder." The Presbyterian denominations take their name from their form of church government, which is governed by elders.

Below is an organizational chart of staff leadership of SPC as of summer 2019.



Lay Leadership

In keeping with our Reformed tradition's emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers," SPC believes it is the privilege and responsibility of everyone – trained ministers and lay people alike – to spread the gospel. Because of this, lay people are involved in the governing and leadership of SPC at all levels. According to the *Book of Order* for our denomination, the spiritual leadership for the congregation is the responsibility of Session.

Session

- Currently consists of 19 Elders in three groups with staggered terms; terms are three years. The size of this group is larger than for other congregations of similar size.
- Is charged with the mission of the church, spiritual care and government of the congregation including maintaining good order and promoting the welfare of the church.

Board Of Deacons

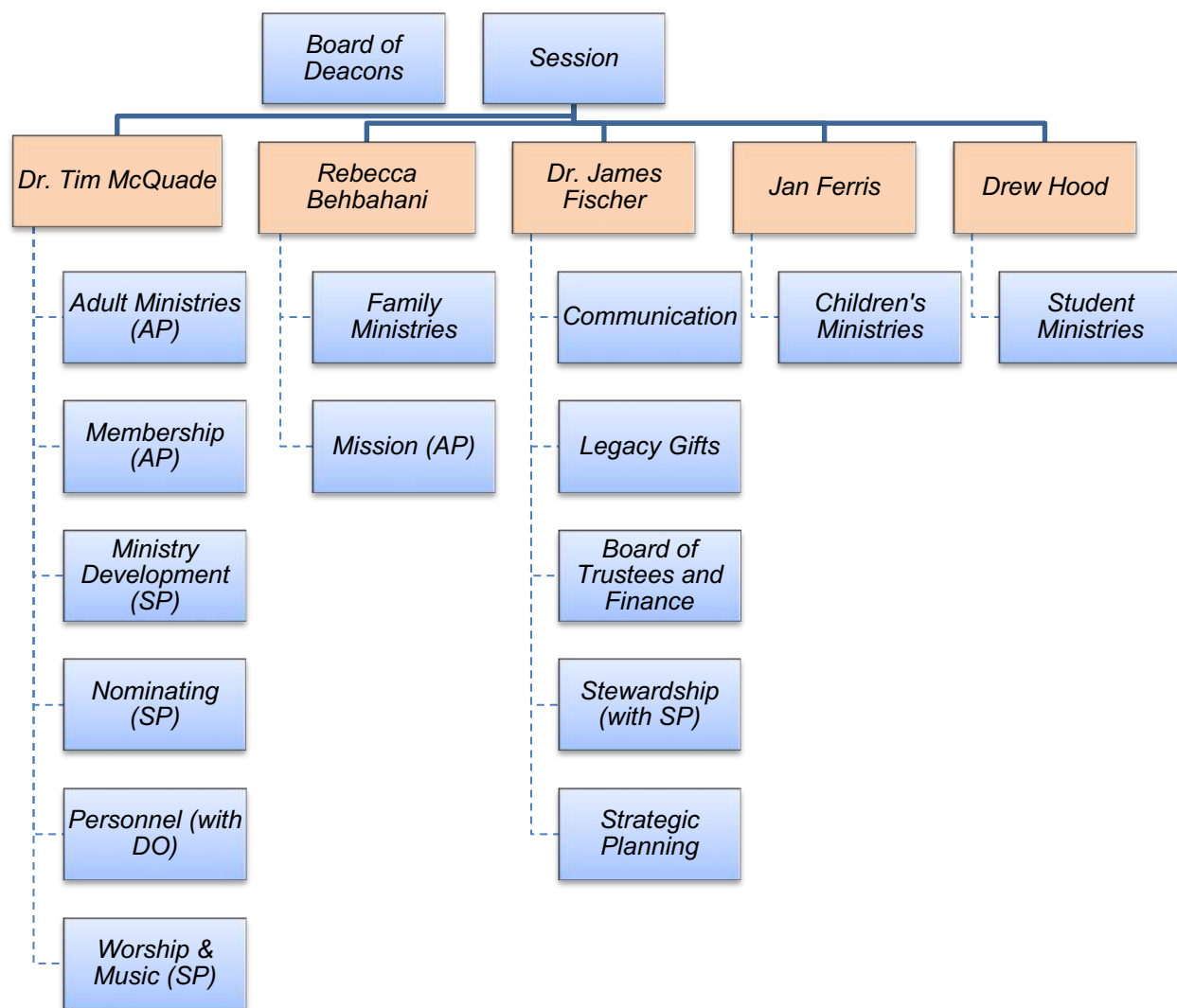
- Consists of at least 18 members in three groups with staggered terms; terms are 3 years.
- Are helpers to the Pastor(s) and Elders in the work of the Lord, specifically charged with ministering to the congregation and the community, the sick, shut-in, bereaved, and anyone else who may be in distress.
- The Associate Pastor helps support the Board of Deacons.

Board Of Trustees and Finance

- Consists of at least 12 members in three groups with staggered terms; terms are 3 years.
- Have the powers to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer real or personal property for the congregation.
- The Director of Operations helps support the Board of Trustees and Finance.

The Session is organized in committees to accomplish the ministries of the congregation more efficiently. Committees are composed of Elders and at-large members, deacons, and trustees, as needed. Committees are normally augmented by a member of staff for support and most are led by a Ruling Elder. All committees have a charter that is approved by Session. Session has instituted an "all-committee" night on the fourth Monday of each month for the committees to conduct their work. Committees use the monthly newsletter and the weekly e-blast to communicate to members. The church also has a Facebook page that has been also highlighting activities; the page has 629 "likes" or followers and had a reach of over 2100 in September/October 2019. Despite the number of members serving on committees and the internal communication mechanisms, some feel communication is inadequate. One focus group participant said, *"a big thing in this church is the communication – it is very poor."*

Below is a snapshot of the committee structure during this interim time.



Orange boxes represent Staff support for committees listed above. AP=Associate Pastor; SP=Senior Pastor; DO=Director of Operations

Standing Committees

Nominating Committee (required) – Holds a one-year term to help nominate persons to fill positions as officers and at-large committee membership.

Audit Committee (required) – Consists of 3 members to examine the financial records of the church no later than June 30 each year.

Adult Ministries Committee – Helps provide opportunities for adults to experience Christian growth through study, hands-on activities, and fellowship.

Communications Committee – Enhances the awareness and participation in church programs and events using various communication tools. This committee is currently under review to determine whether a committee is needed.

Family Ministries Committee – Equips the people of SPC to impress the gospel of Jesus Christ on the hearts, minds, and souls of the next generation.

- **Children’s Ministries**– Oversees the educational program of children in Sunday morning church school, seasonal ministries (VBS), and ministries for children preschool to fifth grade.
- **Student Ministries** – Oversees the educational, spiritual development, and fellowship programs for students from 6th to 12th grade.

Board of Trustees and Finance Committee – Develops an annual operating budget for the congregation, monitors the financial integrity of the operating funds.

Legacy Gifts Committee – Manages endowment program funds, memorial gifts, and honor gifts to the church.

Membership Committee – Oversees activities designed to engage existing members and attract and onboard new members to SPC. This includes coordinating an annual Ministry Fair and all New Member Classes. The Roll Review Committee reports to membership.



Ministry Development Team – Evaluates existing ministries to ensure SPC is preparing for and responding to growth, building on current strengths, assessing areas of weakness, and suggesting remedies for a healthier church

Mission Committee – Interprets mission opportunities and special offerings to the congregation, designates recipients for mission support, and reports on the work of congregational missions for education and awareness.

Personnel Committee – Oversees personnel matters, including hiring, terminating, and reviewing staff annually, recommending compensation guidelines/increases, and maintaining personnel policies and procedures.

Stewardship Committee – Develops a year-round program in Christian stewardship education, including the giving of time, talents, and treasures to God’s work.

Worship and Music Committee - Guides the church’s music program and deals with all matters related to the needs of the worshipping congregation by assessing worship practices, developing programs of enrichment, and expanding the opportunities for strengthening the worship of SPC. This committee is supported by the Sanctuary Guild, which provides weekly care of sanctuary needs.

SPC also has a Hospitality and Strategic Planning Committee.

Ministries and Programs

SPC offers many ways for members to be engaged in growing the mission of Christ...for those who seek out the opportunities.

"Well, you cannot come to church and sit in the back row and listen and watch and go home. You cannot get what it is you need from religion, friendship, or finding your way or doing any of these things unless you get involved. And when you get involved is when you grow spiritually. Every time you get to know people better, you expand. You expand inside."

"I encourage people to participate in Sycamore activities. Once you do that, you participate, then you have ownership and you are part of Sycamore church."

Adult Ministries

Sycamore Presbyterian Church Adult Ministries provides a variety of opportunities for adults to experience Christian growth through study, fellowship, and service. About 24 separate groups fall under Adult Ministries; all Bible studies also include an element of fellowship and service, and fellowship groups also include a faith component. Adult Ministries also encourages spiritual growth by offering special studies, retreats, and workshops.

Adult Bible Studies And Classes

- **Sunday morning adult education.** Several classes meet during the 9:45 AM Connect hour. Some classes are short-term, while others are long-running. Currently 4 or 5 classes are offered each Sunday.
- **Weekday Bible studies.** At least 6 Bible studies meet weekly or biweekly on weekdays. Most are segregated by gender (see the Spiritual Growth section).
- **Men's prayer breakfast** is held monthly on Sunday.
- **StoneMasons** is a men's group that offers encouragement and support to Sycamore Presbyterian men striving to deepen their faith, and to be more peaceful, loving, kind, and joyful in all their relationships.
- **MOPS** (Mothers of Preschoolers) is a Christ-centered caring ministry for mothers of children aged birth to kindergarten. Participants are not necessarily members of SPC.
- **Harmony Circle** is a group of women who come together once a month to strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ and enjoy fellowship. Meetings include a video lesson, discussion, and sharing of prayer needs and praises. Throughout the year, the group finds different ways to serve, such as IHN.



Service And Fellowship Groups

- **Men's Landscaping Team (MLT)** meets weekly on Thursday mornings. The MLT does much more than landscaping. They do painting, carpentry, electric, help with set up/tear down of Lawn Fete, and work with the Congregational Care team to help church members with special projects.
- **Garden Group** is a group of women that meets weekly on Thursday mornings throughout the growing season to plant, weed, prune, and water the flower beds around the church property, as well as enjoy fellowship with each other.
- **Sewciables** are quilters who meet weekly throughout the year to make quilts that provide comfort and care for people in difficult situations. Quilts are donated to church members and their friends/family members who have experienced grief or illness, to newborns in our church family, and to a variety of local and regional charities.
- **Eunice Circle** is a group of women meeting to grow in Christian faith and responsibility, offer prayer support, foster a spirit of giving, and provide opportunities for serving others.
- **Singles** is a fellowship for Sycamore singles, both working and retired. They meet twice per month on Friday nights and on other occasions for service projects and special events.
- **Prime Timers** is a group of Sycamore's seniors, those in the "prime time" of their life. This group offers fellowship through quarterly luncheon events with inspirational entertainment.
- **Prime Timers "Out 'n About"** is a group of Sycamore seniors who travel together on organized trips that offer fellowship and adventure for the day, night, or multiple nights. Previous trips include Israel, Indianapolis, Brown County (IN), Oberammergau Passion Play.
- **R.O.M.E.O.** (Retired Old Men Eating Out) is a group of Sycamore men meeting once per month for dining out and fellowship.
- **Dinners for 6, 7, or 8** is a means for members to meet others. Participants are asked to host one dinner for 6, 7 or 8 SPC members in their home, and attend others. Sign-ups occur in October/November with dinners in January through April.
- **Quilting and Sewing Fellowship** is a group of women who enjoy working on or finishing projects brought from home such as applique, knitting, cross-stitch, and hand quilting.
- **Jewelry-making group** meets weekly for crafting jewelry.
- **Book Club** is a group that meets monthly for book discussion and fellowship.



Family Ministries

Family Ministries oversees Student Ministries and Children's Ministries, and focuses on marriage and family outreach events, including hosting date nights, serving monthly at Matthew 25 Ministries monthly, and helping set-up for Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) guests.

The "Let's Raise a Church" concept was initiated in 2018 to address where we feel the Holy Spirit moving in this ministry with one consolidated message (see below).

Rebecca Behbehani was hired October 2016 as Director of Family Ministries. She completed her undergraduate work at Capital University and master's work at Trinity Seminary, both in Columbus, OH. Rebecca loves working with families, and letting God work through all to create community.



Student Ministries

With a focus on discipleship, driven by "Inspire. Connect. Serve," Student Ministries serves students (grades 6 – 12) in a way that nurtures their relationship with Christ, while meeting their relational and spiritual needs. Drew Hood was hired in July 2017 as the Director of Student Ministries. Drew completed his undergraduate work at Cincinnati Christian University and is working there toward a Master's in Biblical studies and theology. He has grown the youth program to include even more non-SPC students, and more opportunities for our youth to live out their faith by serving within and outside SPC.



The mission of Student Ministries is to reach students, connect them with a family of believers, help them grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, and equip them for a life-long journey of faith so they worship God with their lives.

Student Ministry activities include:

- Bible study and life application are discussed during Sunday morning Connect time, in order to grow students' understanding of biblical truths.
- Youth worship services take place in the Underground student space on Sundays.
- Quest youth group meets on Sunday nights, and is an opportunity for middle school students to study the Bible, play games, eat snacks, and grow in relationship with each other.
- WALK / BABES (for high school students) is a weekly Bible study time designed for asking tough questions and addressing issues students deal with on a regular basis. Valuable relationships are forged, and many students introduce their friends to our youth program through this time.
- Students (8th grade and up) are given the opportunity to study our beliefs and grow their faith during a 4-month confirmation class, and then publicly profess their faith and join SPC as adult members.
- Students have the opportunity to serve on an annual mission trip during the summer. Recent trips have included serving in New York City and in McDowell County, West Virginia.
- High school students explore their faith and connect with leaders and each other during fall and winter retreats. Winter retreat occurs at Springhill Camp in Michigan.
- Students are excited to serve as guides/aides for children during Vacation Bible School and during children's ministry times throughout the school year; they mentor these youngest SPC members and build long-term relationships with them, while living out their faith. Students also serve at IHN, Lawn Fete, Matthew 25, Pancake breakfast, Poverty Awareness Event, Outreach Day, in the tech booth during the worship services, and by performing special music selections in worship services.
- The youth group works closely with Sycamore High School, providing a hot breakfast for teachers, helping to build and grow Sycamore Christian Youth (a Bible study and worship program for students at Sycamore High School), and providing leadership and guidance for students running the program.
- Students connect as they have fun and enjoy outings including laser tag, bowling, harvest festival, lock-in, 5th quarter Friday, canoeing, ice-skating, and the Super Bowl party.



Children's Ministries

SPC is committed to providing consistent, quality, reliable Sunday school in a safe environment. We believe that Christian nurturing is important to the growth and development of the children of this church. Children's Ministries realizes that the family is the primary role model for teaching faith to children, and we are committed to partnering with families so that the children we serve can build a lasting relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jan Ferris was hired in 2002 as Director of Children's Ministries. She holds a Master of Education degree from Xavier University and is passionate about kids and strives to equip families to impress the gospel of Jesus Christ on the hearts, minds and souls of the next generation.

Using the "Inspire. Connect. Serve." framework, Children's Ministry is focused on bringing children (pre-school to 5th grade) closer to Christ. The curriculum currently used in Children's Ministries is Gospel Project.



- Children's Ministries uses the "Connect Kids" time to teach Biblical truths and encourage children to develop a closer relationship with small group leaders as mentors for faith development.
- "Take Faith Home" workshops are also held during the Connect time to provide ways parents, grandparents or caregivers can strengthen faith formation at home through opportunities including prayer, service, blessings, stewardship, devotions and more.
- "Inspire Kids" is a time for kids to worship God in an age-appropriate way. Children's Ministries mirrors the structure of adult worship and teaches "why we do what we do" in worship to bring God glory. Monthly attendance ranges from 14 to 24 children.
- Children are encouraged to connect and put their faith in action through service. Children's Ministries supports Project Linus each year by making handmade blankets that are donated to first responders and other social agencies. Family Ministries also serves together at Matthew 25
- Children earn "Christ Cash," which they donate to specific missions. Each quarter the "money" they donate is sent to the individual mission organization.
- SPC holds an annual Vacation Bible School for those in the congregation and community. VBS brings the gospel to children in a fun and age-appropriate way, and encourages generosity and service by helping the children make handmade items for a local mission. In 2019, 36% of the VBS attendees were from SPC, and the remaining 64% came from other churches in the area or did not have a church home.



Music Ministry

Sycamore Church is very blessed to have an active and talented music program in which all participants sing and play from their hearts and lead the congregation in praising God through music. We feel God has His hand in our church music program and for that we give Him praise.

“The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: “He is good, His love endures forever.” 2 Chronicles 5:13

As we see in the verse above, people were created by God to glorify Him by making, experiencing, and being moved by music. As far back as 1848, when our church began, music has been an integral part of our services. Today we continue the wonderment of music in our services. God created music and is glorified when it is performed.

“Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts.” Psalms 105:2



Sujin Kim was appointed Director of Music in June 2016. In her part-time responsibilities, Sujin is both the organist and pianist for both services. Sujin studied piano and organ at the University of Cincinnati School of Music. She received her master's degree in Performing Arts and is a doctoral candidate in piano performance at the College Conservatory of Music. In addition to playing both organ and piano, Sujin is director of the 30-member chancel choir. Sujin was preceded by Jeong-in Kim from 2015 to June 2016 and by full-time director Joe Dilley from 1996 to 2014.

The men and women of the choir are dedicated to the success of the music performed each Sunday. The choir sings weekly from September through May in both services and may also participate in other special services during the year including Maundy Thursday, Ash Wednesday, Thanksgiving, and Choir Sunday. Choir practice is on Wednesday evenings from 7:00-8:30. The choir requires no auditions and there are no paid lead singers, as everyone is valued for their contribution. Everyone learns music skills and supports other members. On special occasions, professional musicians accompany the choir.



“I really like the music. I just love the old hymns. I really enjoy it when we sing an old hymn that we haven't had for a long time.”

The Bell choir currently consists of 20 members who practice together on Tuesday evenings. The playing of the bells creates a beautiful sound throughout the sanctuary and supplements our worship music. The Bell choir performs off-site at the Mason Christian Village and other venues each year.



The Steinway piano, located in the sanctuary, has been with Sycamore for more than 25 years. It receives regular maintenance and tuning. The organ has been with the church for over 20 years and is maintained and tuned regularly. In 2013, new organ wall pipes were purchased and installed in the new church sanctuary. Over the years, many talented musicians have played on our piano and organ. Each December, Michael Chertock, the principal keyboard musician of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, performs a Christmas concert at Sycamore Church, with proceeds donated to a local charity. Members of the congregation and community look forward to this sold-out concert of piano and song.

Lawn Fete

Lawn Fete (pronounced like the word "fate") has been our church picnic and fundraiser for 112 years, and the money raised there helps support SPC Missions. The 100th annual Lawn Fete was held September 15, 2007.

The origin of Lawn Fete is believed to have been an ice cream social, first held June 23, 1907. The Women's Missionary Guild voted to have this event featuring a dinner and a few activities—a time of fun and fundraising for a small church. Through the years, it has grown in scope to a major event involving over 100 volunteers and remains a time of fun and fundraising. The original event consisted of cake, ice cream, sandwiches, lemonade, and coffee. The 2019 Lawn Fete included books, furniture, jewelry, trinkets, "kids kornet," snacks, food, "grub grab" and the silent auction. The ice cream social returned to Lawn Fete this year.



Prior to pastor Ted Kalsbeek's arrival, tables were set up outdoors. The women did the cooking at the home of Augusta Lucke, adjacent to the church, as the church building did not have electricity. Ms. Lucke selected the date for Lawn Fete based on the Zodiac calendar and the event was rarely rained out. The auction began after Rev. Kalsbeek became pastor when cakes remained after the dinner and someone suggested the cakes be



auctioned off. Thus began the auction that grew over the years. Rev. Kalsbeek was the only auctioneer for many years (at least into the late 1980s), and the auction ran from 5:00 PM until the last item was sold – some six or seven hours later. There would be no trace of Lawn Fete when the congregation arrived for church on Sunday. Items sold for \$0.10 to \$10.00 in 1968.



In August 1955, the men of the church were taught by personnel from WLW Farm in Mason how to build a concrete block fire pit for barbequing chicken. The instructions originated with the Poultry Science Department at The Ohio State University. Files include a sauce recipe for 100 servings of chicken. The fire pit is assembled several days before Lawn Fete each year on the driveway near the kitchen door; cooking usually begins at 11:30 AM on Lawn Fete day. By 1978, the men were cooking 520 pounds of chicken; in 1988, that amount had climbed to 586 pounds.

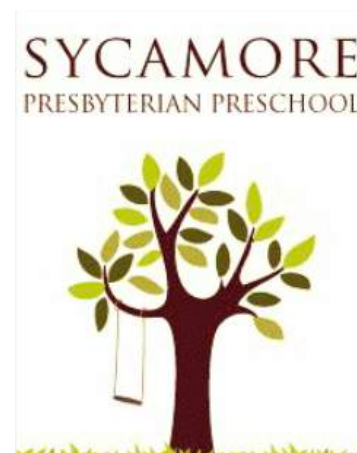
In recent years, Lawn Fete proceeds have been split between SPC projects and local charities:

Year	Total Proceeds	Proceeds Designation
2010	\$30,268	12% to SPC Ministries, 38% to Chapel renovations, 16% to each Happy Church, Wilmington Project, and SPC Student Ministries mission project
2011	\$38,006	50% to SPC Student Ministries space, 25% each to Happy Church and Wesley Chapel Mission
2012	\$37,184	75% to SPC narthex and café furniture, 25% each to Respite Care and Tender Mercies
2013	\$36,363	75% to SPC debt elimination and expansion, 10% each to Assistance League of Greater Cincinnati and One-Way Farm, 5% to SPC Student Ministries mission project
2014	\$36,154	30% to SPC parking lot repairs, 23% each to One Way Farm, City Gospel Mission, and SPC Student Ministries mission project
2015	\$26,089	40% to SPC Trustees projects, 20% each to City Gospel Mission, Center for Respite Care, and SPC Student Ministries mission project
2016	\$20,756	17% to Montgomery Road sign, 23% to SPC carpet fund, 20% each to SPC Student Ministries mission project, Wesley Chapel, and Operation Give Back
2017	\$33,324	40% to SPC worship technology, 20% to SPC Student Ministries mission project, 16% each to New Life Furniture Barn and Operation Give Back, and 8% to Heavenward Farm & Horsemanship
2018	\$32,278	30% to SPC long-term maintenance, 20% each to SPC Student Ministries mission project, New Life Furniture Bank, and Operation Give Back, and 10% to Heavenward Farm
2019	Approx. \$33,000	SPC long-term maintenance fund and Operation Give Back

Sycamore Presbyterian Preschool

"Jesus said 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.'" Matthew 19:14

Sycamore Presbyterian Preschool (SPP) is an important part of Sycamore Presbyterian Church's mission outreach to the community, although it is an independent legal entity. Sycamore Presbyterian Preschool is one of the few preschools in Ohio that has received a prestigious Five-Star rating for the *Step Up to Quality* childcare rating system, which ensures the highest quality of care to the children enrolled at SPP. Many criteria are considered before this honor is awarded, including staff/child ratios and interactions, staff qualifications, curriculum, staff/parent communication, health and safety, and administration.

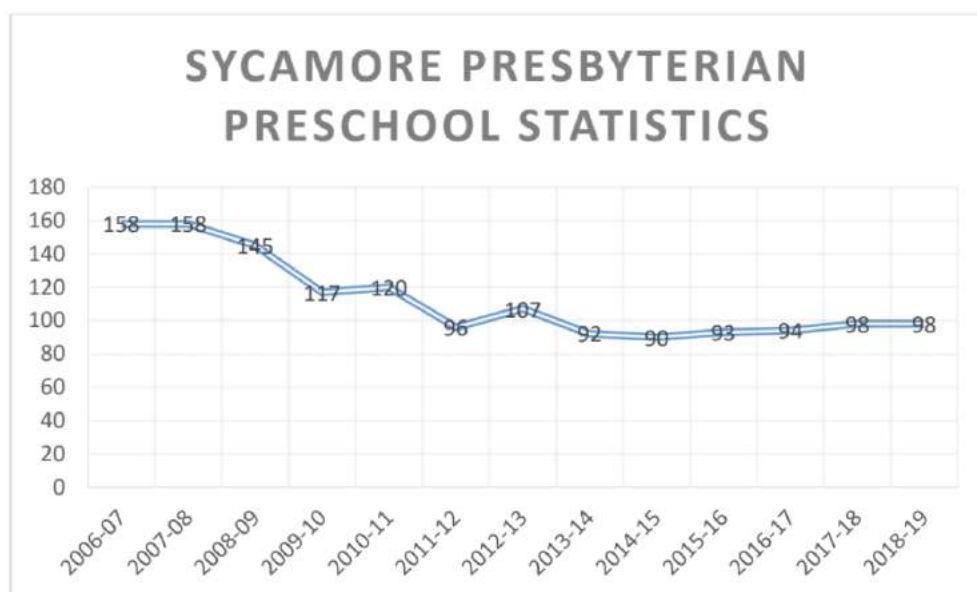


SPP's child-centered curriculum provides developmentally appropriate activities for children ages 3-5 years old. The daily hands-on activities cover all areas of interest and learning, including science, math, reading, writing, sensory exploration, music, exercise, block building, manipulatives, art, small and large group learning, and free choice. SPP's curriculum encompasses the Early Learning Standards developed by the Ohio Department of Education and leads directly into Ohio's K-12 Standards.

SPP believes that the whole child is very important. The program is designed to provide a loving, caring Christian environment that is supportive, nurturing, and responsive to each child's individual needs. Each child's total development includes positive self-esteem, as well as spiritual, emotional, social, mental, and physical growth. Each child is provided an opportunity to develop in these areas at his/her own pace.

Over the last decade, enrollment has decreased, resulting in a decrease in staffing and classrooms. In the 2018-2019 school year, SPP had 12 teachers serving 98 students in 8 classes. Fewer than 10% of the students come from SPC families, and an estimated 75% come from the Loveland area.

SPC provides the facilities, utilities, and custodial care for the preschool, and the SPP donates funds to the church finances. Marketing efforts include the church website and banner in front of the church. SPC members typically serve on the Board of Directors of SPP (not all seats) but are not heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the preschool. Regular updates are provided to the congregation.



RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD



“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

Relationship to the World		
Engagement	Local Community Context	View from Outside In

RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

Engagement In The Local Community

Sycamore Presbyterian Church has a heart for serving others in our own communities and beyond, and many of us feel we are best at “being the church” when we are serving as Jesus’ hands and feet in the world. With gratitude for what we have been given, we try to share Jesus’ love with others around us, particularly the needy, the hurt, and the lost. SPC members, both individually and corporately as a congregation, share our time, talents, and gifts with those in need.

“Each of you should use whatever gifts you have received to serve one another” 1 Peter 4:10

SPC’s engagement in the local community has been challenging for us to think about given how many communities are “local” for us (see next section for more detail). Much of our current outreach is through nonprofits covering needs across many of our local communities, and we support them with funding and volunteers. One way that SPC and other churches in the area work in our communities is by engaging with the schools, either directly or indirectly through faith-based nonprofit organizations.

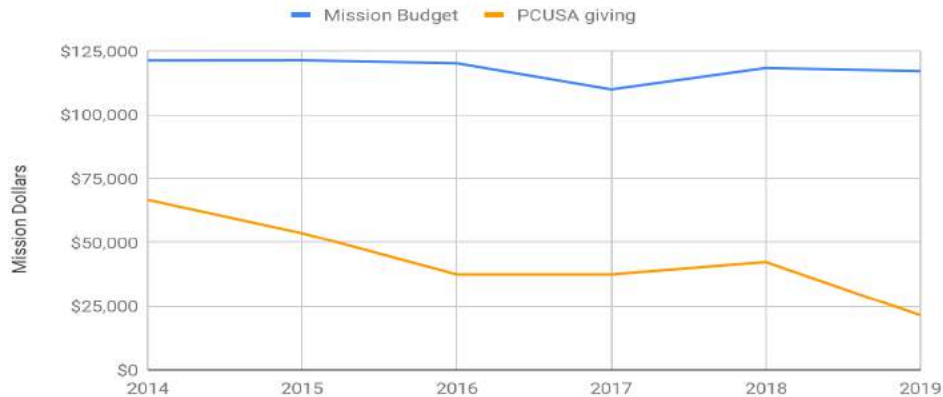
In the last 20 years, SPC’s engagement varied significantly over time, from a dramatic response to a local tornado in 1999, when the church opened its doors as someplace the community could “shop” for clothes, household goods, nonperishable food, and lost family photos, to minimal involvement during a time of internal turmoil during the years between long-term Pastor Ted Kalsbeek and when we called Pastor Dr. Larry Kent in 2004.

One of our long-standing points of engagement with the immediate community around the church has been an annual day called Lawn Fete (see previous section for more detail). Historically, it had a high attendance from the surrounding community, and it appears this may not be as true as it once was. SPC is modifying this event to adjust to changing times and will continue to learn how to be more effective in today’s environment.

We have been evolving our overall local community engagement the last 5 years, spurred on by our involvement in an initiative by our Presbytery in 2014-2017 called Transformation 2.0. One key outcome of that study was that we discovered that many of our members were engaged in local ministry, usually faith-based and apart from SPC, which told us our members were eager to be Christian servants in the community. We have been working to create those opportunities to serve in the name of Christ through SPC, as well as continuing our traditions of benevolence giving.

SPC historically strives to tithe by allocating close to 10% of the operating budget toward benevolence giving. The mission committee continuously evaluates mission partners to better increase congregational and intergenerational involvement in mission and outreach.

SPC Benevolence Giving



Contributions by SPC to PCUSA efforts to support the General Assembly, Synod Mission, and Presbytery Mission and Theological Education funds have ranged from 30-55% of the SPC mission budget; 18% is planned for 2019 to allow SPC to spend closer to home for a greater local impact.

More recently, the number of organizations that SPC partners with has been pared down based on the following philosophy:

- Give more funds to make a larger impact
- Align missions to our calling
- Connect to the mission more fully

SPC's Mission Committee is enhancing communication to members of the congregation by providing more information on the ministries and SPC's impact. As part of that enhanced effort, a new "serve" counter was built in the narthex to provide volunteer opportunities to the congregation throughout the year.



Below is a summary of the local ministries and organizations SPC supports. Most of the ministries we volunteer with are also supported financially by SPC.

Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN): an organization with the mission to provide families experiencing homelessness emergency shelter and hospitality through interfaith communities and to work with families to find and retain stable housing. Three or four times per year, SPC hosts families for a week at a time through the IHN program; families experiencing homelessness have been housed and fed at SPC for 17 years. SPC volunteers cook and serve meals, set up sleeping areas, socialize with guests, help children with homework, and spend the night at the church.

Sugartree Ministries: a faith-based ministry in Wilmington that serves meals, supplies groceries, and offers 12-step recovery programs. SPC volunteers serve meals at Sugartree four times per month, and needed items are occasionally collected at SPC and donated.

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati: a nonprofit Christian housing ministry that seeks to eliminate substandard housing locally and globally by building and renovating decent, affordable homes to sell to low-income first-time homebuyers, who also help to build the homes they buy. SPC members volunteer 4-5 workdays per year and recently worked on homes in Bond Hill and Lincoln Heights.



Matthew 25 Ministries: a faith-based organization that provides donated products to disaster victims and needy people worldwide. SPC volunteers, organized by Family Ministries, serves at Matthew 25 several times per year to sort and process donated goods.

NEEDS (North East Emergency Distribution Service): a local nonprofit housed at Kenwood Baptist Church that provides food, clothing, school supplies, and emergency assistance to families in need in northeastern Hamilton County. SPC volunteers collect school supplies and clothing for school children and serve on the Board.

Loveland Initiative: a local nonprofit that helps Loveland school children and their families. SPC members contribute volunteer hours and school supplies.



Operation Give Back: a local nonprofit organization that promotes educational equity and provides community outreach to students and families in need. OGB works closely with the Sycamore School District to provide after-school tutoring, backpacks of school supplies, and food for students and families, and to coordinate a holiday store, food pantry, and health awareness programs. SPC volunteers collect supplies and Christmas gifts for Operation Give Back.

Coalition of Care/Care Portal: an organization that is part of the Safe Family movement, where safe, loving families voluntarily host children for short periods of time to assist the parents as they work to recover from crisis or dysfunction. SPC supports this through Care Portal, a technology which Coalition of Care uses to connect the material needs of children and families in crisis with people and churches who have the resources to help.

FAITH Emergency Services: a ministry which provides emergency relief to individuals and families in Mason, Deerfield Township, and South Lebanon. This emergency relief can include rent, utility bills, prescription drugs, food and school clothing. SPC volunteers collect supplies and clothing and serve on the Board.

ProKids: a nonprofit that recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers to become Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) to speak up for children who have been abused and neglected

and help guide them into safe environments in alliance with the government child protection system. SPC members serve as children's advocates with ProKids.

Center for Respite Care: a local organization with a mission to provide quality, holistic medical care to people experiencing homelessness who need a safe place to heal, while assisting them in breaking the cycle of homelessness. SPC members served meals at CRC on Outreach Day and hosts an annual Michael Chertock Christmas concert benefitting CRC.

Many of the previously described ministries that seem to focus internally on the church also have important outreach components. For example:

Sewciables: Donates handmade quilts to nonprofit organizations and nonmembers experiencing loss, grief or illness. In 2018, these totaled 44 quilts given to charities such as Care Portal, Sunset Gap, and Project Linus, and another 79 to nonmembers in difficult situations (mostly friends or extended family of SPC members or GriefShare and DivorceCare participants).

Knitting Ministry: Donates handmade knit blankets, baby caps, mittens, and booties to several local and regional charities including Care Portal, Sunset Gap, and Keep our Kids Warm.

Eunice Circle: Packs and donates gift boxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Our Evolving Understanding Of Local Ministry – Transformation 2.0

Members of SPC participated in the Cincinnati Presbytery Transformation 2.0 efforts that encompassed 18 congregations, 16 pastors, and over 30 Presbytery leaders. This effort was about learning by acting our way into new thinking, reflecting on what we have done, and trying new experiments. The premise was asking "How do we go about cultivating new habits and practices to enter and engage our neighborhoods and communities in a new and different way?" Key insights from the work concluded: 1) God is working in our neighborhoods, 2) Transformation begins with us, and 3) Relationships between churches are essential for our future.

At SPC, we learned through our experiments and reflection that: *The Spirit of God is raising up leaders in our communities to care for all of the people; the Spirit is calling upon us to participate and asking us to share their stories.*

The Transformation team conducted a survey of the SPC congregation on their service activity in the community. Of the 164 reporting members, 105 or two-thirds are involved in community service and ministry organizations. This gave us an understanding of how much our congregation wants to serve in the local communities.

As a result, SPC identified three new mission opportunities aimed to give members an opportunity to serve locally: Loveland Initiative, Operation Give Back, and Coalition of Care/Care Portal (see above).

Another outcome of Transformation 2.0 effort was SPC Outreach Day.

SPC Outreach Day

SPC's Outreach Day was initiated in April 2018, as an answer to God's call to serve and pray for people in our community. It provided an opportunity for the entire congregation to be involved in a day of community outreach, mission, and prayer. It was the planning team's hope that the SPC Outreach Day would ignite a spark within the congregation to become more missional in mindset and behavior. In its first year, over 150 members and friends served. In 2019, 210 people served at 11 locations, giving 755 hours of labor.

A key element of the Outreach Day was the use of a special Outreach Day yellow t-shirt worn by those serving from SPC. This t-shirt is now commonly worn for other outreach and church activities.



Global Outreach

SPC supports several international missions including efforts in Guatemala, Senegal, and Kenya. In 2019, a Mission Committee subcommittee was formed to guide our continued interest in these mission activities. We have determined to have just a few international mission activities that we can support very well, and that fit with the past and current mission interests of our members.

Guatemala: SPC has been involved in mission efforts in Guatemala through a partnership with a sister Presbytery serving the K'anjob'al people group of northeastern Guatemala. Adult and youth members made a number of short-term mission trips to serve side by side with the K'anjob'al Presbytery members in building a new presbytery office and branch theological education center for the youth of the presbytery.



Recently SPC helped PRESGOV, an arm of the National Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, achieve an important milestone. The financial gifts our church gave to exclusively support this project resulted in the purchase of a new van for use in transporting mission groups throughout the country. We received the following letter from the Guatemala National Church (translated from Spanish):

Brothers and Sisters (of) Sycamore Presbyterian Church PC(USA)

As we greet you in the love of Jesus Christ, we wish that the grace and blessing of our great God be with each of the members of your church.

With this letter, the administrative committee of PRESGOV, of the National Presbyterian Church of Guatemala recognizes that your church, through the funding efforts and contacts of missionary Philip Beisswenger, contributed 82,347.95 quetzales towards the purchase of a van. This provided the necessary down payment towards the total cost of Q 255,528.00. The balance of the purchase price will be covered by our committee. This van will be used in support of the Presbyterian work in the Coban region of Guatemala.

Our committee extends our most profound appreciation to your church for this monetary gift. Please accept our gratitude, and may the Lord continue to bless and prosper your lives in the service of Jesus Christ.

We conclude, thanking you for your attention.

Attentively,

*Pastor Eli Oseas Sañez,
Clerk of the Committee*

This project was initiated by the SPC Mission Committee about 5 years ago and proved to be a significant accomplishment in the ministry of the church in Guatemala.

Wycliffe Bible Translators: SPC has long supported mission efforts in Africa through Wycliffe Bible Translators. Sent out by Sycamore Presbyterian Church and others over 30 years ago, Rudy and Laurie Klaas began missionary service through the Wycliffe Bible Translators in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), facilitating the development of the written form of the Mangbetu language, particularly for literacy and translation of the Scriptures. When political and other difficulties reached their area in 1994, the Klaas family relocated to Senegal where Rudy became the Literacy Coordinator. Laurie taught preschool and kindergarten before she began assisting the Senegalese language teams in language-program planning and Scripture engagement.

While still living in Senegal and serving with Wycliffe, Rudy has become a consultant to partners like Bible Societies, USAID, the World Bank, and International Rescue Committee, serving in Darfur refugee camps, South Sudan, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries in Africa.



Open Arms International: SPC has more recently begun supporting Open Arms International in Kenya. This ministry is focused on giving homes and education to orphaned children. Vulnerable children fight hunger and malnutrition, medical problems, abuse, lack of education, social discrimination, and more. They need advocates to help them break the poverty cycle. Unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and broken relationships contribute to countless social and spiritual problems in local Kenya communities.



At Open Arms Village, hundreds of orphaned or vulnerable children have overcome the odds and joined a new family. Whether they stay for days, months, or years, each child experiences the power of family and the love of Christ in a tangible way.

Open Arms International's reach extends beyond the village. They are passionate about forming deep, healthy relationships with those in their community and serving them in a way that displays the love of Christ and inspires them to address the root causes of the issues they face.

The Open Arms International Village homes, school, and church all operate with one goal: to help others understand who God is and who He's created the residents to be. Counselors, teachers, social workers, and house parents work with each child to identify and encourage areas of purpose and passion, and the Church at the Village and other outreach programs extend that mentorship to those in the community.

SPC members have volunteered on mission trips to Open Arms International, and we support the organization monetarily.



The Local Community Context

Sycamore Presbyterian Church is located on what was once called Sixteen Mile Stand. The name “Sixteen Mile Stand” results from the use of Montgomery Road as a stagecoach route and refers to a stagecoach stop sixteen miles from Cincinnati. This route became known as “3-C highway,” connecting Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland.

Our local community actually comprises several different communities. While we are physically situated in Symmes Township, we are at a crossroads of several middle/upper middle-class communities northeast of Cincinnati, and we draw members from all of them.



There are too many communities to adequately summarize the history of each, and they are similar, with original settlements of European descendants in the late 1700s, after the Revolutionary War.

From the Symmes Township website: “The Symmes Purchase was one of the first major land deals after the American Revolution in the Northwest Territory. It created the foundation for not only the city of Cincinnati and the state of Ohio, but for settlement and statehood as Americans pushed further west. Many of the early settlers in the Miami Valley region were veterans of the American Revolution. After the Revolution, the young government lacked the money to fully pay soldiers. Soldiers were permitted to use the IOUs issued during the war as payment for land in the Northwest Territory. This arrangement made the purchase of land in Ohio easy for Revolutionary soldiers.”

Many of these communities stayed somewhat rural until the mid-20th century and grew rapidly during the economic high of the 1990s when families of some affluence moved north of Cincinnati in search of newer homes and amenities.

Prominent communities in the map above include:

Zip Code and Community	Population (2017 Est.)	Approx. Household Median Income*
45249 – Cincinnati/Sixteen Mile Stand	13,273	\$ 76,549
45242 – Cincinnati/Blue Ash	22,328	\$ 87,350
45241 – Cincinnati/Sharonville	24,066	\$ 80,934
45140 – Loveland	55,782	\$ 87,547
45040 – Mason	53,848	\$ 97,629
45039 – Maineville/Deerfield Twp.	24,142	\$ 86,129

* Household Median Income for Ohio is \$52,407. U.S. Census - American Factfinder

All of these communities are projected to modestly increase in population in the next five years.

Another way to look at the local community is to look within an imaginary circle drawn around the church; Precept data shown below is for a Study Area consisting of the region within a circle of 3-mile radius around SPC. Currently, there are 63,394 persons residing within this area, representing an increase of 9,575 or 17.8% since 2000. Additionally, the population within 3 miles of SPC is projected to increase by 2.7% (1,734 persons) by 2024.

Population History and Projection	2000 Census	2010 Census	2019 Update	2024 Projection
Study Area	53,819	59,941	63,394	65,128

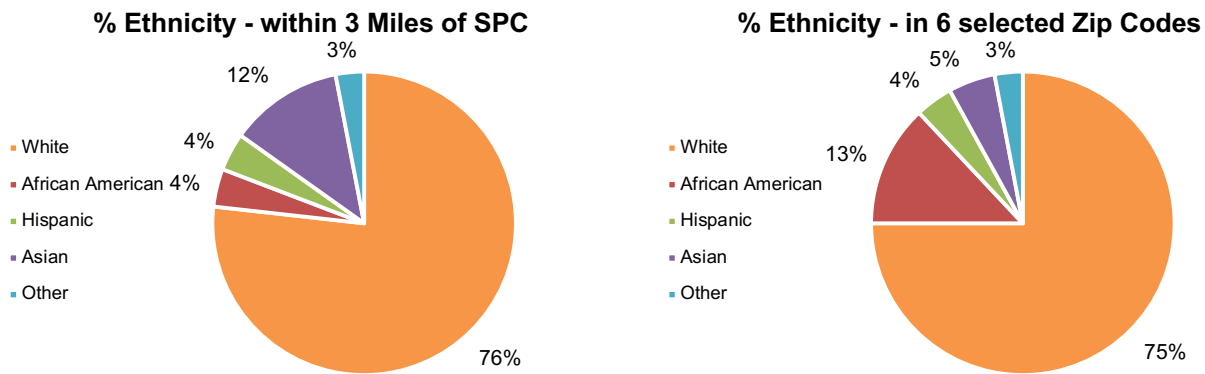
Population Change	Actual Change from 2000 to 2010	Actual Change from 2010 to 2019	PROJECTED Change from 2019 to 2024
Study Area	11%	6%	3%
U.S. Average	10%	7%	4%

Although the communities around SPC have historically been mostly Caucasian and well-educated, diversity of the area increased significantly in recent years as people of color and immigrants from multiple countries have arrived. Often, these newcomers have less-advantaged socio-economic status than the majority population, and this difference is more noticeable in the schools. The schools, particularly the elementary schools, must cope with large numbers of students who don't speak English and who qualify for reduced-cost lunch programs.

Households by U.S. Lifestyles Groups	Affluent Families	Middle-American Families	Young and Coming	Rural Families	Senior Life	Ethnic & Urban Diversity
Study Area	64%	15%	17%	<1%	3%	<1%
U.S. Average	15%	31%	15%	13%	7%	18%

Population by Race/Ethnicity	Anglo	African-American	Hispanic	Asian	Native Am. And Other
Study Area	76%	4%	5%	12%	3%
U.S. Average	60%	12%	18%	6%	3%

The racial/ethnic diversity is considered very high in the area around SPC, according to the Percept definition. In the 3 miles surrounding SPC, Percept data indicates that Caucasians represent 76.2% of the population, as compared to 98% of SPC members; and all other racial/ethnic groups make up 23.8% (vs. 2% of SPC members), which is below the national average of 40%. The Asian ethnic group accounts for 11.8% of the population and is projected to be the fastest growing group, increasing 19.8% by 2024, followed by Hispanic (+17.8%), "Other" (+12.4%) and African American (+5.9%). The Caucasian population is projected to decline 1.4% over the next 5 years.



The reasons for this rapid increase in diversity are not clear. However, community leaders and some church members feel that the hiring practices of international companies such as Proctor & Gamble, General Electric, and WorldPay may be contributing to this growth in diversity.

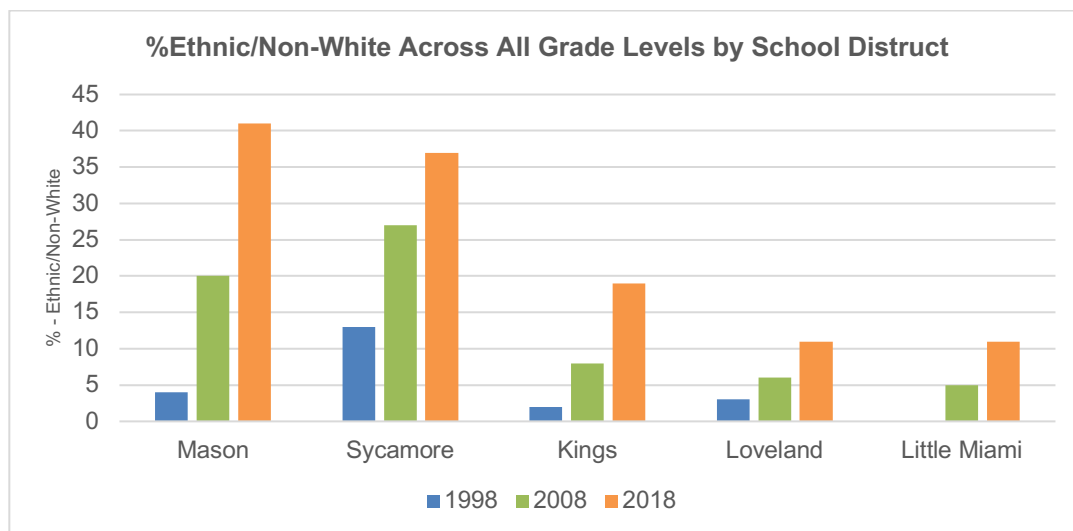
A significant element of these local communities is that the school districts are very good to excellent:

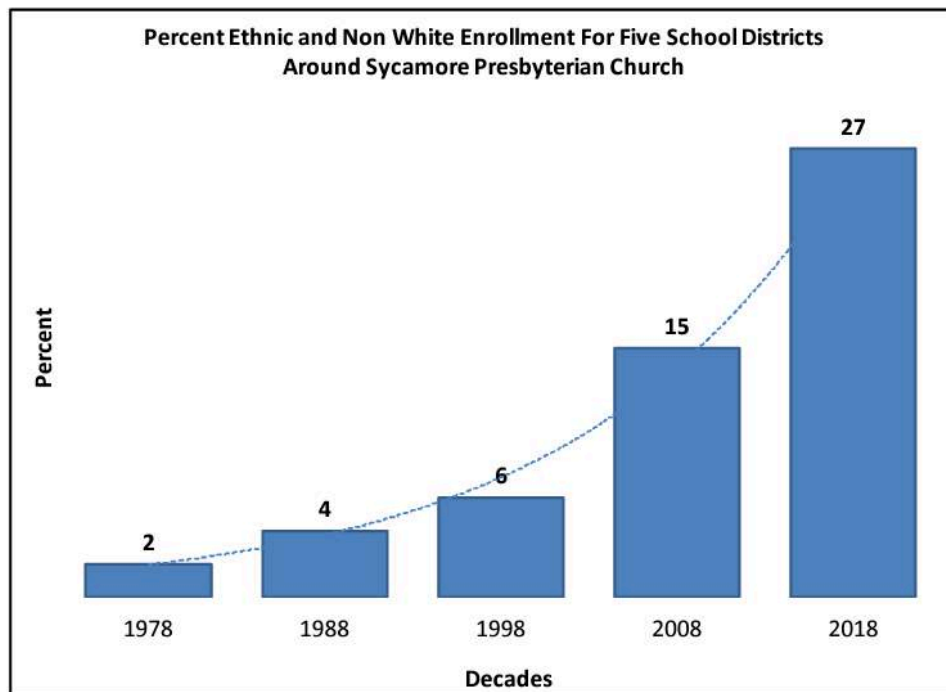
School District*	Rating by the State of Ohio
Kings Local	B
Little Miami Local	B
Loveland City	B
Sycamore Community City	B
Mason City	A**
Indian Hill Exempted Village	A**

*According to the State of Ohio's website, all of these school districts were in need of "improving K-3 readers".

**Only 9 school districts in the State of Ohio are rated an A.

The recent rapid change in racial/ethnic makeup of our communities is reflected in school enrollment data of the major school districts around us:





Percept Group looks not only at SPC's external context from a demographic standpoint, but also at community issues and faith preferences around us. Data reflect responses of people in a 3-mile radius and in the 6 selected zip codes where most of our congregants reside. According to Percept data, the primary concerns of the community surrounding us that are likely to exceed the national average include:

- Time for recreation/leisure
- Aging parent care
- Achieving a fulfilling marriage
- Childcare
- Parenting skills
- Satisfying job/career

Households by Primary Concerns Group	The Basics	Family Problems	Community Problems	Hope and Dreams	Spiritual/Personal
Study Area	21%	11%	15%	36%	15%
U.S. Average	24%	11%	16%	30%	15%

Regionally Indexed Stress Conditions (RISC)	Households Below Poverty (\$15,000)	Households with Children: Single Mothers	Adult Pop.: High School Dropouts	Primary Concerns: The Basics	Primary Concerns: Family Problems	Primary Concerns: Community Problems
Study Area	5%	16%	4%	21%	11%	15%
U.S. Average	11%	25%	13%	24%	11%	16%

As an overall category, concerns related to “Hopes and Dreams” are the most important to households in our area in comparison to national averages (36% vs. 30%). Additionally, the area is considered “below average” in the stress conditions known to contribute to community problems, such as households below the poverty line, households consisting of single mothers with children, and high-school dropouts. Family problems and community problems are at the U.S. average.

Additionally, the Percept data suggests that those in the community around us desire church programs that provide opportunities for “recreation,” to a greater extent than the U.S. average, and much more than they desire programs for spiritual or personal development.

Households by Church Program Preference Category	Spiritual Development	Personal Development	Community/Social Services	Recreation
Study Area	22%	10%	17%	42%
U.S. Average	25%	10%	20%	38%

View From The Outside In

It is important to note that “community” may have a different definition than it did in the past and that definition can vary by individual, especially with the younger population. For example, one community could be a soccer group and to another could be a Facebook group of common interests.

There remains the traditional view of community, and in this time of transition, we want to better understand our surrounding communities, identify areas of opportunities and understand how our community perceives Sycamore Presbyterian Church. A total of 13 external interviews were conducted. Interviewees represented schools, churches, and public safety or municipal organizations:

Schools:

- **Kings School District** has 4,399 students in pre-K to 12th grade and is close to SPC.
- **Symmes Elementary** is part of the Sycamore School District, currently serves 550 students, and is located near SPC on Enyart Road.
- **Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy** is a private Christian school for students in pre-K to 12th grade. It has approximately 1300 students and has three buildings located within 3 miles of the church and one elementary school (K-6) located in downtown Cincinnati (Armleder School).

Churches:

- **Good Shepherd Catholic Church** is an 11,000-member parish located in the city of Montgomery. Good Shepherd is considered a “contemporary” Catholic church, with its 3 projector screens and lack of stained-glass windows, kneelers, and pews.
- **St. George Russian Orthodox Church** is located in Loveland and has approximately 150 regular worshippers. Most members are first generation and/or have married into a Russian family.

- **Montgomery Community Church** is located within 1 mile of SPC and has service attendance ranging from 1,300 to 1,800. Their mission is “Engage, Live, Serve.” River’s Crossing Church in Maineville grew out of this church and started with 200 members who agreed to worship at the new location.

Non-profit organizations:

- **Operation Give Back (OGB)** is a nonprofit organization that provides tutoring, school supplies and a food pantry to local students. SPC actively supports OGB (see previous section).
- **Sycamore Bridges** is a nonprofit organization that “bridges” community needs (as identified by the Advocates) with organizations or people that can meet those needs.
- **Coalition of Care / Care Portal** is an organization that uses a software tool to match up needs with those who can provide help. They input specific needs; most of these come through Hamilton County Jobs and Family Services (JFS) and Safe Families, an organization that provides foster care for families that temporarily and voluntarily relinquish custody of children until specific criteria has been met. The software shares the need to churches within the area in hopes of fulfilling the needs.

Government/Public Safety/Business:

- **Symmes Township Administration** is the government for our local municipality.
- **Loveland-Symmes Fire Department** is the department that contracts with Symmes Twp. to provide Fire and EMT services in our area.
- **Hamilton County Sheriff Department District 3** is the division that contracts with Symmes and Sycamore Twps. to provide policing.
- **Little Miami Valley Business Alliance** is a unified Chamber of Commerce for multiple communities in the area, serving Loveland, Symmes Twp., and Maineville.

From these interviews, some characteristics and aspects of our community can be assembled into themes that are important to SPC as we move forward into the future. These are:

Theme # 1: Increasing Diversity

The community has been changing rapidly in the last 10 years; the local leaders interviewed have seen it and provided us additional information.

- **Immigration:** Interviewees indicated these new residents are mostly immigrants from a wide range of countries: Russia, Poland, China, Japan, Pakistan, India and Philippines.
- **Apartments:** It was believed that most of this new diversity is centered in specific apartment complexes. Some of these complexes are subsidized for low income or Section 8 housing.
- **Schools:** The schools are seeing the biggest changes in the elementary schools, which suggests the new residents are mostly young families. They are also seeing an increase in the need for food support (reduced-costs lunches or extra food to take home for the weekend), suggesting that some of these new residents have economic challenges.
- **Employment:** Interviewees could only speculate about why these immigrants have rapidly moved into our surrounding communities. The most interesting was an assertion that a local

company, World Pay, had provided increased employment opportunities during recent years. World Pay, a competitor to PayPal, operates in numerous countries around the world; the Cincinnati location is one of the hubs for its headquarters. Another speculation was that there had been an increase in affordable housing over the last 10 years in the general area, enabling people with lower income to move here and send their children to the great schools in this community.

Theme # 2: Population Is Growing

Most of the major school systems around us are expanding their facilities to accommodate the increase in students, which indicates an increase in the number of young families in the communities around us. This is also consistent with projections made on census data that the population in our local communities is continuing to grow.

Theme # 3: Limited Awareness Of SPC

Most interviewees had no previous interaction with SPC and were aware of us because of our location on Montgomery Road, a main north-south road in the area. Many refer to SPC as the “church with the cross on top.” The impression was that we are prosperous because of our relatively recent building expansion. Some were aware of and positive about our preschool program. There was some awareness of Lawn Fete. This limited awareness of SPC is not surprising given how we have tended to engage in local service mainly through nonprofits.



Theme # 4: SPC Contact Is Positive

People who have had some previous contact with SPC have a positive impression of us. In particular, Rick Pack from Care Portal recognized SPC's participation is a strong source of support for Care Portal. For example, SPC, Montgomery Community Church and Armstrong Chapel are all local churches that participate, but SPC has the strongest participation. Pastor Emeritus Ted Kalsbeek, who continues to be involved in Loveland organizations was called a “pillar of the community” by the Loveland Fire Chief.

Theme # 5: Church Partnerships Are Welcome

Local officials (government, public safety), schools, and other churches report the local needs are increasing, and everyone would like to see more engagement from the churches. Many of the interviewees commented on the various partnerships they developed to meet these community needs and expressed their enthusiasm to partner or strengthen the partnership with SPC. These partnerships allow churches, school districts, and nonprofit organizations to jointly better meet the needs of the community.

Partnerships with and among the faith-based community are welcomed. Kings School District already has well-developed partnerships with multiple faith-based organizations to address food insecurity. Symmes Township, which has an emphasis on providing family activities and sports programs for its residents, would love to partner with SPC to support our family activities, such as Trunk or Treat, which could attract Symmes Township residents.

Our community is diversifying, especially in the last 3 years

The external interviews consistently supported how our surrounding area has become more diversified, especially in the last 3-5 years. This diversity can be subdivided into related subcategories, such as the increase in immigrant families who have English as a second language (ESL) and the increasing trend toward a lower socio-economic level.

Socio-economic Diversity

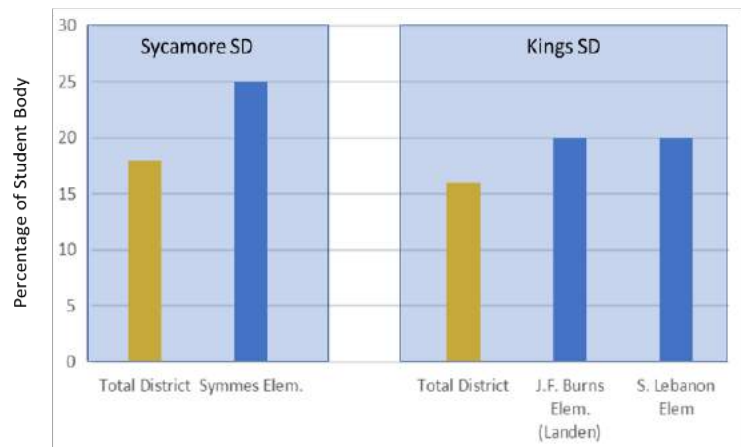
Several interviewees mentioned the widening gap between the “haves” and “have nots,” with families ranging from living in poverty to living in million-dollar homes.

Within the school systems, socio-economic status can be measured by the percentage of students on the free/reduced lunch program. In general, all schools have a population segment in these programs, with increased percentages in the elementary schools.

This may reflect the increased percentage of cultural diversification the past 3-5 years. As reported by Kings School District, many families are living paycheck-to-paycheck and just able to pay the bills.

Percentage of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch Program

Higher percentage in elementary schools (blue bars) than total district (orange bars)



Within the Sycamore School District, this population is mostly found in a specific apartment complex, subsidized housing, and smaller homes. The map (see left) identifies the apartment complexes and subsidized housing relative to Sycamore Presbyterian Church.

Care Portal shared that requests have grown 30-40%; this may not necessarily indicate that needs have grown correspondingly, but rather that more people are being served.

We have numerous opportunities to serve others in our own backyard.

English As A Second Language (ESL) Diversity

Our community and our schools have many individuals and families born outside the U.S. These families range from professional families in the U.S. on a short-term work assignment (i.e., P&G or GE employees) to refugees. These populations may be highly transient due to changing work assignments or frequent moves to find work. Within the Kings and Sycamore School District, the number of countries and languages represented within the schools demonstrates the wide diversity in our community:

Sycamore School District

- Total district: Students come from 40 countries and speak 40 native languages.
- Symmes Elementary: Almost 20% of students have English as their second language, with 20 native languages represented

Kings School District

- Kings kindergarten class: Seven of the 24 students have English as their second language.
- J.H Burns and South Lebanon Elementary: 42 native languages are spoken.

Symmes Township has noted many immigrants coming into the area, many of whom are non-English speaking. Priest Daniel Marshall of the Russian Orthodox Church commented that a significant Russian population exists in our area. The Russian community has price-supported housing to attract other Russian families.

Poster displayed at Symmes Elementary. Red stars represent birthplace of student population.



CHURCH HISTORY AND SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.” Deuteronomy 32:7

Church History & Spiritual Journey

CHURCH HISTORY AND SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

In order for us to know who we want to be, we need to understand where we have been.

Our journey began when Rev. Robert Warwick preached the first Associate Reformed sermon in the Northwest Territory in 1794. Rev. Warwick founded and was the first pastor of the church in 1796 and formally organized it as the Millcreek Congregation (near present day Glendale, Ohio). That church has evolved into what we know today as Sycamore Presbyterian Church. Beginning as an Associate Reformed Church, SPC became part of the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1858. Its centennial was celebrated on September 6, 1898. Today, we are part of the Presbyterian Church (USA).



A founder and one of the church's first two elders was area surveyor Jeremiah Morrow. Mr. Morrow served as a state senator, then a U.S. (House) Representative and U.S. Senator, and finally became Governor of Ohio in 1822, a position he held until 1826.

From its first original location, the congregation moved to a site near Sycamore Creek, from which we derive the church's name. In 1848, at its fourth and final location in Symmes Township, a single brick room

structure was built and served as our primary building for more than 100 years. This structure is now a part of a larger complex and continues to serve the congregation as a chapel and meeting location. In 1998, the chapel was renovated in honor of its 150th anniversary. The original building is registered as "American Presbyterian and Reformed Historical Site #11."



A long succession of student part-time preachers, and pastors served for short periods of time and moved the congregation along. During 1949 and 1950, a young seminary student named Rev. Theodore (Ted) Kalsbeek served as a summer supply student. In 1951, Rev. Kalsbeek was called as our pastor and served for over 40 years. In that time, the congregation grew from 30 worshippers in a one-room building to a large congregation with an extensive church campus. Several members recall Ted reaching out to them and personally inviting them to worship services. Rev. Kalsbeek is also credited with growing Lawn Fete and youth groups. He also expanded worship services due to the

increase in size of the congregation. To accommodate the growing attendance, worship was moved to what is now referred to as Fellowship Hall. In September 1994, Rev. Kalsbeek retired and SPC was served by Interim Pastor Robert Wade. Rev. Kalsbeek is still considered a "pillar of the community" by several community leaders in the area. Even last November (2018), Rev. Ted Kalsbeek, considered

Pastor Emeritus of Sycamore Presbyterian Church, led the Veteran's Memorial Service hosted by Greater Cincinnati Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge at SPC.

In 1997, the congregation called Rev. William Gestal Jr. to be its Senior Pastor/Head of Staff; Rev. Gestal led the church until 2001. This period proved to be one of the "lowest periods" of SPC and this call ended. SPC was provided another Interim Pastor (Rev. Harris Schultz).

On March 21, 2004, the congregation unanimously called the Rev. Dr. Larry Kent, who had previously served in multiple pastoral positions at First Presbyterian Church of Flint, Michigan, to be the Head of Staff. Rev. Dr. Larry Kent began his ministry as Senior Pastor in 2004. His compassionate heart and personable style brought the church through a time of healing and into a time of growth and increasing optimism. Congregants found Larry to be a true blessing in their lives, providing personalization and congregational care, a little humor, and inspiring Sunday worship. Programmatically, Larry felt his greatest contribution was launching the Prayer Ministry on Sunday mornings, as it allows a way to remind church members what we are called to be about and to encourage others to share in a more intentional life of prayer.



In an effort to relieve pressure on seating at the 11:00 service, an abbreviated third service was launched in what is now called the Ted Kalsbeek Chapel (the original building and sanctuary). Additionally, a study was conducted by a consultant group (Living Stones) in 2008 to explore a solution to address the growing membership at SPC. As result, SPC was further expanded (see Facilities), with an official ground-breaking on September 11, 2011, and with services commencing in the new sanctuary on December 16, 2012. The new sanctuary was dedicated on January 6, 2013.



The chapel had its original pews in place until recently. A commemorative original and restored pew was installed in the current sanctuary in 2019.



Additionally, this photo hangs in the area outside of new sanctuary in commemoration of our history.



In December of 2018, Dr. Kent announced his intent to retire in June 2019 and the congregation initiated steps to search for a new pastor in April 2019 – starting with this Mission Study report.

Since 2004, SPC has had a series of assistant pastors. And in the last 4 years, there were 11 people in 4 positions within staff at SPC.

- Rev. Barb Tesoraro – installed as Interim Associate Pastor assisting with pastoral care and as a resource for Adult Education from 2004 to 2006.
- Dr. Jerry Pitman – joined September 15, 2006 and came from First Presbyterian Church in Flint, MI (the same church as Dr. Larry Kent). Dr. Pitman oversaw pastoral care, Adult Ministries, Mission, and lay leadership training. Dr. Pitman retired March 2014.
- Rev. Shirley Hutchins – joined SPC as an Associate Pastor for Adult Ministry in late 2008. Shirley had a big and wonderful heart and reached out to everyone. Her special talent of word selection at the pulpit was greatly appreciated. She passed away in June 2014.
- Rev. Elliott Winks – joined SPC on February 24, 2014. Elliott was given leadership of the Deacons, Membership, Mission, and Men's ministries. Rev. Winks then moved into Families Ministries. Elliott loved our youth and arranged for a couple of youth groups to sing in concert and his enthusiasm was evident. Elliott left SPC April 2016.
- Rev. Linda McClanahan – joined SPC as the Interim Ministry Director for Pastoral Care in September 2014. She was familiar with SPC as she worked as an Associate Pastor under Rev. Bob Wade from 1996 to 1998. Linda had a special talent for reaching out to all and knowing their names. Linda left SPC in 2016 and is still beloved by many in the congregation; she was recently a guest speaker for Women's Ministries.
- Dr. Tim McQuade – joined SPC March 1, 2017, as Associate Pastor and Pastor of Congregational Care. Prior to arriving at SPC, Tim served as an Associate Pastor at Loveland Presbyterian Church, Chaplain for Hospice of Cincinnati, and was the Spiritual Care Coordinator at the Lindner Center of Hope, a local mental health treatment center. Dr. McQuade is currently serving as the Interim Senior Pastor and Head of Staff of SPC.

SPC'S FUTURE:

*Who Is God Calling Us To Be?
Where Is God Calling Us To Go?*



“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-21

Who Is God Calling Us To Be? Where Is God Calling Us To Go?

Discerning God's call for Sycamore is a process and it requires us to consistently search our hearts and Scripture by asking and answering, "What is God calling our church to be as we move toward the future?" Connecting the dots between current realities and the movement of God's Spirit should be an essential practice for us in this ever-evolving world.

One young focus group member shared:

"I believe that an ideal church goes into the lives of others around our community that aren't necessarily members, and they change the lives of those people, helping them in some way. And, the church should change the lives of the members in it and bring them closer to God, and in that way, change them."

As the Mission Study Task Force listened to SPC members and community members, some dots were connected. Some church members and staff spoke passionately about SPC's future and where we feel the Spirit might be leading us. Together, we discerned something of what, we feel, God is calling us to be. These include being:

A Community More Reflective Of Our External Community

God is bringing the world to our doorstep. How should we respond? What would God have us do, given that we are planted in this place at this time?

At SPC, we are a college-educated, relatively affluent congregation motivated to serve others and give out of the abundance given to us by God. Our natural response should be to see the emerging opportunities for service in the community – new people and new places where we can show the love of God and make a difference in the lives of others. We should look for these opportunities, especially in partnership with other churches and community organizations, and become more directly engaged in our many communities. This will be a growing edge for us, to find a way to be more engaged in our local communities without being overwhelmed with how many communities we encompass.

Our leadership will need to be strategic in thinking about and planning what we do and how we do it. Just as important, we need to reach across the socio-economic and cultural divides to embrace and be friends with people who differ from us. We will have a learning curve to be able to do this.

"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Romans 12:4–5

Most of us have spent our lives among people with similar backgrounds, lifestyles, income, and educational status. And while we see the broad diversity within that of thoughts, opinions, and attitudes, it's likely we are naïve about how much differently others experience and think about life and faith when they come from non-white, non-American, non-affluent, or non-English-speaking backgrounds. Bridging across these differences may be surprisingly difficult, despite our good intentions. According to

comments made in the focus groups, people who joined the church in the last few years didn't initially find SPC to be particularly friendly or particularly inclusive, even though longer-term members very much feel that it is. If we aren't effective at welcoming people similar to ourselves, how can we be effective at welcoming people who are clearly different?

This is particularly relevant to our challenge of being a spiritual home for the younger generations, since a significant portion of the demographic increase in young families in our communities is composed of immigrants and people of color.

We need our leadership to equip us in this challenge, to help us understand differences and how to bridge them to "widen the circle" of Christian community that most of us have found at SPC.

A Community More Relevant To The Parents Of Younger Children

We are an aging congregation, with young families in the communities all around us. How do we connect and invite them into the "family" of God at SPC? Most of us have already recognized that we are an aging congregation, and we believe that God would want us to become a "whole family" again, with a full complement of members younger than 50.

What we have seen and felt is confirmed by the data. Our membership of young families has not kept pace with the demographic growth in the communities around us. SPC membership age 50 and younger has significantly fallen in the last 8 years, in direct contrast to the increase in local school enrollments.

There are reasons for this both inside and outside the church. We are challenged to continue to be relevant to and spiritually supportive of the parents of young families, who live in an incredibly fast-paced culture increasingly intertwined with technology in daily life. One person in a focus group spoke of SPC as a "beautiful bubble," not a criticism but a concern about how insulated we are from the current culture.

We have put in place three full-time staff for Children, Youth, and Family Ministries, a significant allocation of our budget. And progress is being made.

Yet, the challenge is bigger than adding staff or specific programs. Are we willing to put in the time and energy to understand in a holistic way what makes church and faith relevant to younger people? Are we willing to make adjustments and grow from "this is how we have always done it" to make the church feel welcoming and like "home" for the next generations? Are we willing to support with our personal time and energy the initiatives of the staff intended to help introduce SPC to young people and families in the community? Can we transform ourselves into a church, a part of the body of Christ, that fosters community, spiritual growth, and service to others among all age groups in ways that we have yet to imagine?

A Community More Connected To Our External Community

We are a church of "doers," and we have energy to address community issues. We may have a lot of older folks, but we have plenty of spirit and life and the Holy Spirit moving us forward. We should find ways to guide and direct our compassion to help our local neighbors in need.

Interviews with community representatives revealed new and growing challenges in our community, including increasing numbers of children who speak little English and children who lack quality preschool, and increasing numbers of families lacking basic needs or facing an opioid-related crisis. We have a beautiful facility that is quite empty throughout the week. Could we connect to our community by opening our facility and volunteering to help students with basic English? Could we offer space for a local food pantry, scout troop, or WhizKids program? Better connecting with our community would improve the world around us in small ways and help further God's kingdom.

In addition, we should support, as a whole church, community-connecting events like those that SPC Family Ministries develops and implements. How many of us understand that the annual Trunk or Treat held by Family Ministries in our parking lot is an outreach to the surrounding community to give young kids a safe place to dress up in costume and collect treats? We have a lot of opportunities to become more connected to our community.

A Community Continuing To Grow In Discipleship And Faith

We believe the work of the Holy Spirit is done with and through us. Authentic discipleship happens when we experience Christ-like relationships with each other. When becoming a member, we are asked "Do you intend to be his disciple, to obey his word and to show his love?"

Many in the focus groups expressed their personal spiritual journey has expanded through more educational offerings and small group discussions. This aligns with PCUSA's "1001 Worshipping Communities" effort, which uses new and varied forms for the diverse and changing culture around us. This may be something we would want to consider as it appears there is a hunger for even more education and discussion to share the deeper questions and concerns in life as we collectively and personally go forth on our spiritual journey in Christ.

The success of Outreach Day has also highlighted this hunger to serve and show God's love, as participation increased in its second offering. The Holy Spirit is still on the move, calling us to share in what God is doing in the world.

In order to do these things, to become a community more reflective of our community, more relevant to the parents of younger children, more connected to our community, and continuing to grow in discipleship and faith, we need to become:

A Learning Community

in which we instill a culture of listening to what God might be saying to us, discerning why God might be saying this, experimenting with how we can learn more about God's will, and evaluating what we learned from our experiment, in order to live into a new future as a congregation undergoing transformative change in the Spirit.

We, both leadership and congregation, need to be wise and thoughtful. Not everything has to change all at once, and we can try new things as nonpermanent “experiments” with clear objectives and criteria for evaluation. None of us are prophets who can see every ramification of a specific change, so we need to adopt a humble posture of learning and listening to God as we move forward together, step by step.



“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”

Colossians 1:9b-10

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” Colossians 2:6-7

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