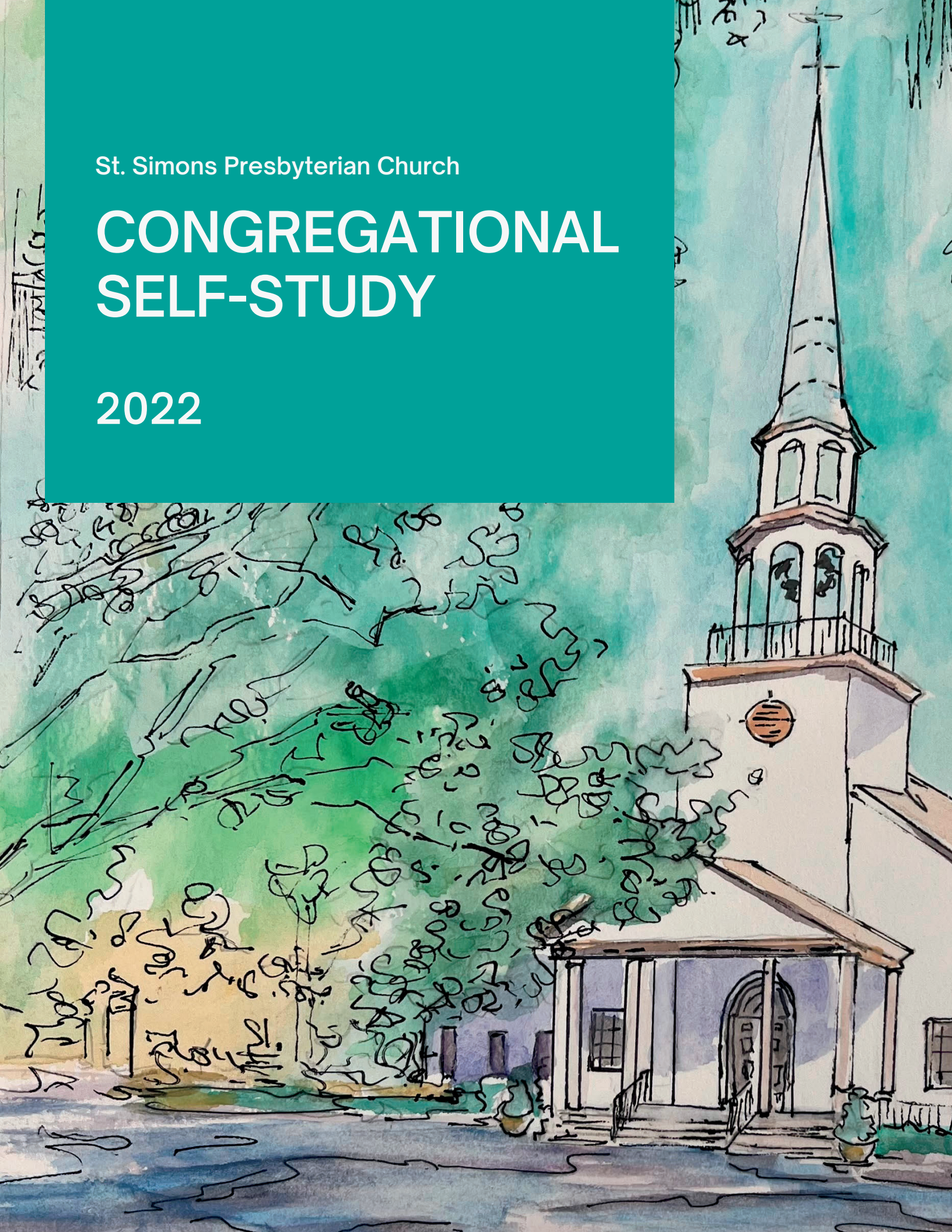


St. Simons Presbyterian Church

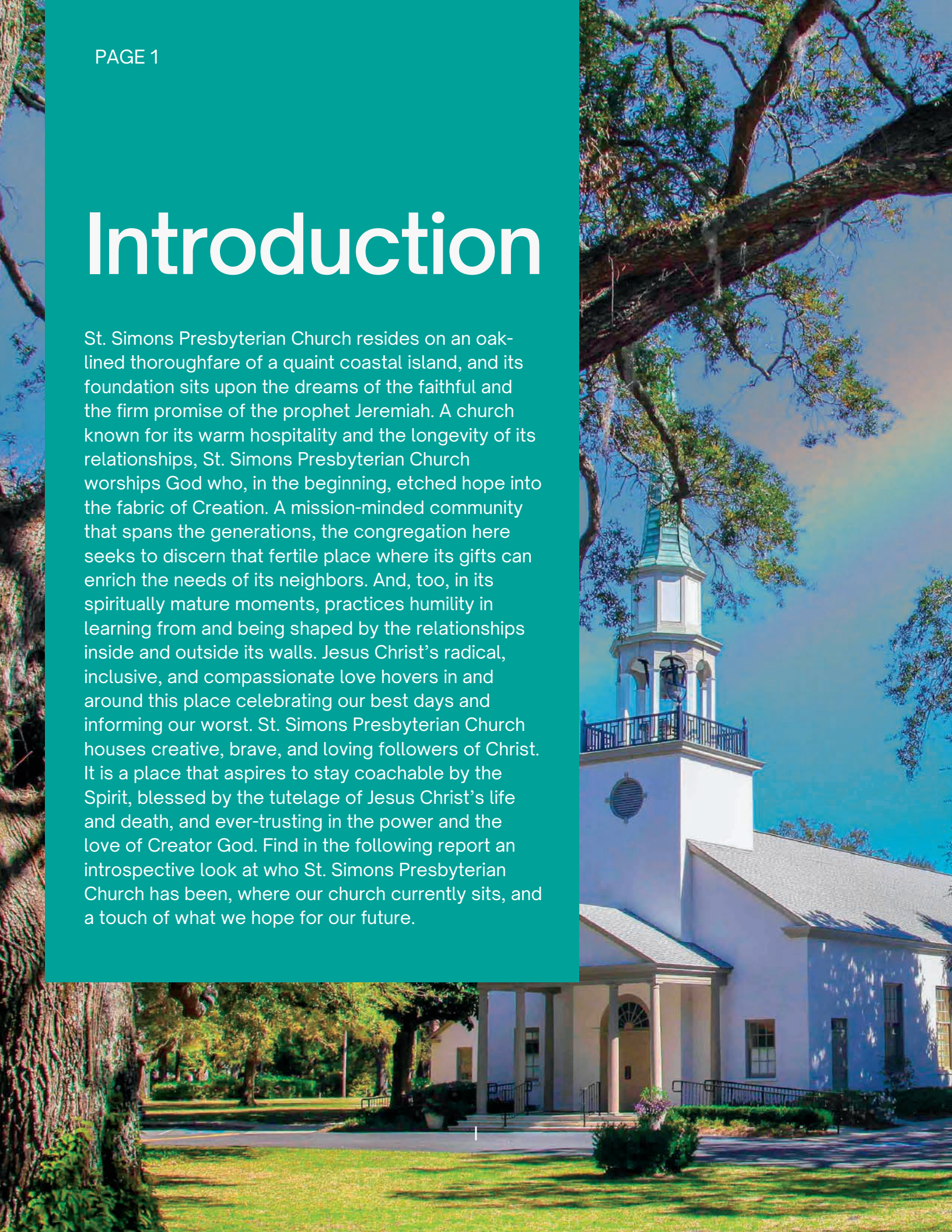
CONGREGATIONAL SELF-STUDY

2022



Introduction

St. Simons Presbyterian Church resides on an oak-lined thoroughfare of a quaint coastal island, and its foundation sits upon the dreams of the faithful and the firm promise of the prophet Jeremiah. A church known for its warm hospitality and the longevity of its relationships, St. Simons Presbyterian Church worships God who, in the beginning, etched hope into the fabric of Creation. A mission-minded community that spans the generations, the congregation here seeks to discern that fertile place where its gifts can enrich the needs of its neighbors. And, too, in its spiritually mature moments, practices humility in learning from and being shaped by the relationships inside and outside its walls. Jesus Christ's radical, inclusive, and compassionate love hovers in and around this place celebrating our best days and informing our worst. St. Simons Presbyterian Church houses creative, brave, and loving followers of Christ. It is a place that aspires to stay coachable by the Spirit, blessed by the tutelage of Jesus Christ's life and death, and ever-trusting in the power and the love of Creator God. Find in the following report an introspective look at who St. Simons Presbyterian Church has been, where our church currently sits, and a touch of what we hope for our future.



Mission Statement

We are a people who celebrate God! We rejoice in God's creation, respond to God's calling, and rely on God's faithful covenant. We are a people who serve Jesus Christ. We lift soup ladles for the hungry, build homes for the homeless, tutor students who need a friend, and touch God's children all around the world. We sing praises to God in worship, listen for God's word from the pulpit and enjoy God's comfort during our wilderness days. We are a people who expect Christ's return. We declare it when we break bread together, announce it when we share the cup, and trust in it with each baptism. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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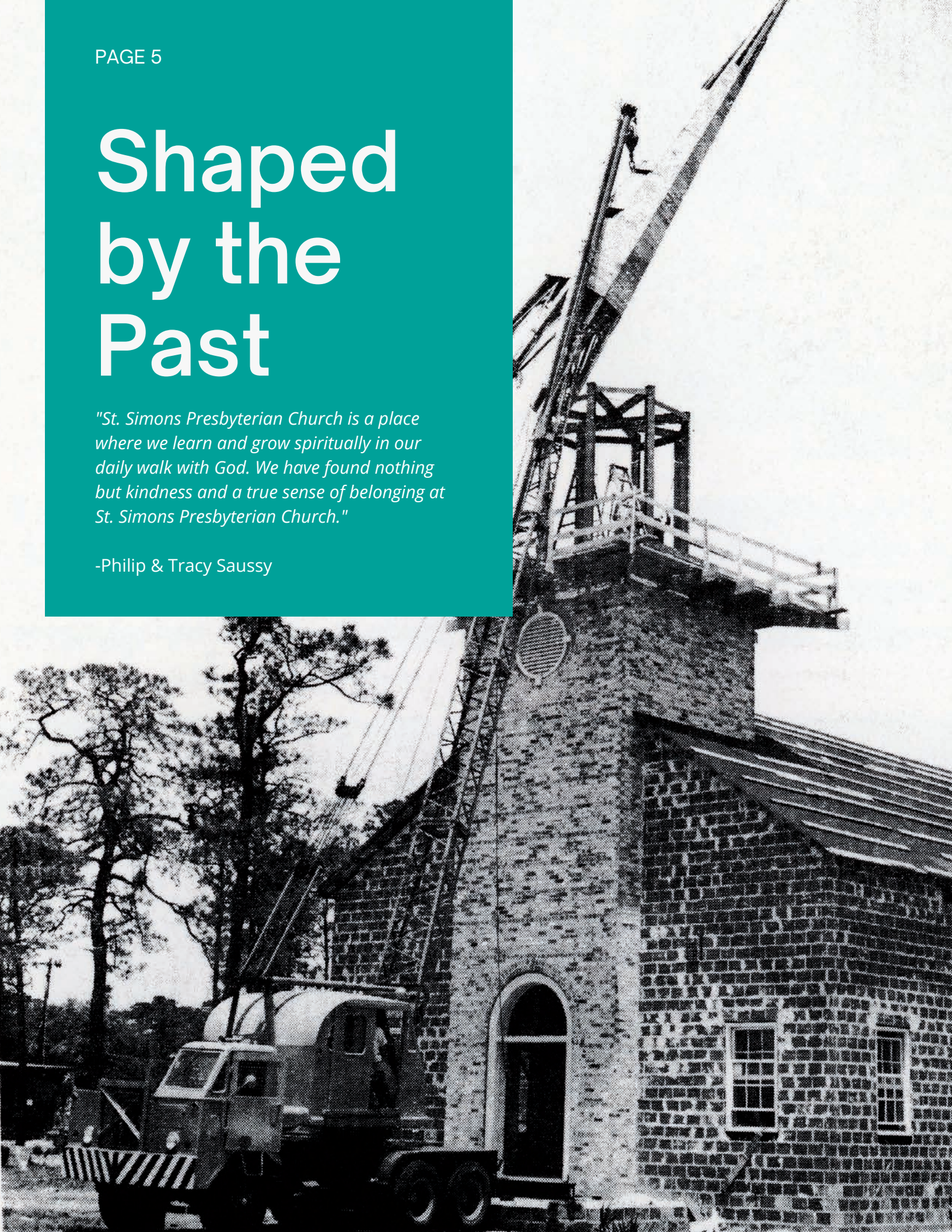
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Shaped by the Past

"St. Simons Presbyterian Church is a place where we learn and grow spiritually in our daily walk with God. We have found nothing but kindness and a true sense of belonging at St. Simons Presbyterian Church."

-Philip & Tracy Saussy



History of Pastoral Leadership

The history of St. Simons Presbyterian Church is distinguished by stability in its leadership combined with a steady growth in its membership and ministry over the past 76 years. Five senior pastors have been primarily responsible for oversight of the church and its congregation since its Day of Organization on September 29, 1946. St. Simons Island, the community that this church calls home, is one of Georgia's 15 barrier islands and a popular resort area known for its sandy beaches, salt marshes, fishing, and beautiful sunsets. Since it was planted, the development and growth of St. Simons Presbyterian Church has mirrored that of the island itself, which grew from a population of less than 1,700 in 1946 to nearly 16,000 full-time residents today.

Rev. Thomas Lyttleton Harnsberger (1946-1947)

Rev. Thomas Harnsberger was instrumental in the establishment of St. Simons Presbyterian Church. After graduating from Union Theological Seminary, he found his calling as a missionary. From 1912-1939 he served in China and was then sent to Georgia, where he became the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Brunswick. It was during this time that Rev. Harnsberger began to explore forming a church on St. Simons Island. In December 1945 a small group of parishioners held regular prayer services in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Fendig to worship and pray for fulfillment of their vision of an island church. By the spring of 1946 Sunday services were being held at the Island Casino Theater. As interest grew, Sunday, September 29, 1946, was designated the Day of Organization. Forty-six members of the church attended the service along with the entire congregation of First Presbyterian Church in Brunswick. Rev. Harnsberger's sermon was titled "The Vision of a Church".



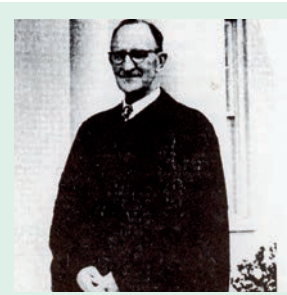
Rev. Thomas Harnsberger

*Pastor at First Presbyterian in Brunswick, GA
and Visionary of St Simons Presbyterian Church.*

**Sunday,
September 29,
1946, was
designated the Day
of Organization for
St. Simons
Presbyterian
Church.**

Rev. Dr. James Thornwell Gillespie (1947-1958)

Rev. Dr. James Gillespie was St. Simons Presbyterian Church's first called pastor. From his first sermon on January 5, 1947, until his retirement on June 1, 1958, Dr. Gillespie was a guiding force for the growth and development of the church. Key to the establishment of the church in its current location was a donation by Miss Maida McDonald, a member of Brunswick's First Presbyterian Church, of her mother's bequest. These funds were used as a down payment for the purchase of land for the church.



**Rev. Dr. James
Thornwell Gillespie**

By 1950 St. Simons Presbyterian Church was entirely self-sustaining, and the membership had more than tripled from the 46 charter members to 167 members. Plans were made to continue the vision of building a church with the establishment of a building fund in March of 1951. Ground was broken on March 1, 1954, and just 8 years after the Day of Organization, the first worship service and the Day of Dedication were held on September 25, 1954, in the church's new sanctuary. During Dr. Gillespie's ministry, the vision of having a Presbyterian church on St. Simons Island became a reality.

Rev. Dr. Benjamin Franklin Moore (1958-1980)

After being called to the church, Rev. Dr. Ben Moore preached his first sermon on December 1, 1958. During Rev. Moore's 22 years of care, the congregation of St. Simons Presbyterian Church grew and became grounded as progress brought new traditions. The first "Live Nativity" was held Christmas of 1963, and to this day, it is a beloved tradition in the church and island community. The Thanksgiving morning pancake breakfast was started in 1971. Another milestone was reached in 1971 when Frances Worst became the first woman in the church elected and ordained as a deacon. The following year Miriam Benefield was ordained as the first woman elder.



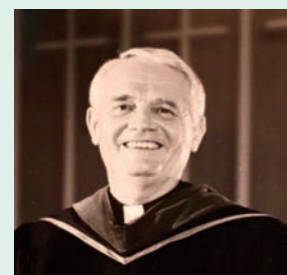
**Rev. Dr. Benjamin
Franklin Moore**

Under Rev. Moore's leadership, the congregation also began a long history of reaching out to help others. In 1961 the Jekyll Island Presbyterian Church was planted, and St. Simons Presbyterian Church made a financial pledge to support the development of the new church. Members also contributed to the fund for the building of the All Faiths Chapel at Milledgeville State Hospital. In 1962, for the first time, the church organized a Stewardship Committee to assist with budgeting. By the following year, St. Simons Presbyterian Church led the Savannah Presbytery in per capita giving to benevolences. Seventeen years later, as Rev. Moore's era was ending, the island was on the verge of entering a new era of dramatic population growth.

Rev. Dr. John Harden Law (1981-1996)

Rev. Dr. John Law preached his first sermon at St. Simons Presbyterian Church on April 5, 1981. Dr. Law grew up in the First Presbyterian Church in nearby Brunswick. As a child, his pastor was Rev. Harnsberger, who had the vision of an island church. Dr. Law had actually attended the "Day of Organization" held at the Island Casino Theater as a 12-year-old.

Dr. Law characterized the church as having strong leadership, which grew from the church's congregation. Whether it was the church treasurer, Sunday school superintendent, or building committee, everyone seemed to take a personal interest and ownership



**Rev. Dr. John
Harden Law**

of their responsibilities. The doubling of St. Simons' population between 1980 and 1990 from 6,566 to 12,805 residents was felt directly at St. Simons Presbyterian Church. During this time there were many visitors who filled out pew cards which led to pastoral contacts which led to potential new members. A review of the church's list of new members from 1987-1996 indicates an average of 68 people joined the church each year. Membership growth was steady and continuous.

The church campus grew to include the fellowship hall, kitchen, large recreational room and children's building. St. Simons Presbyterian Church became known as a family church with full Sunday school classes, a playground for the children, and the start of a preschool program which continues today. A new children's building was added in 1993, which continues to house this program. Throughout his tenure, Dr. Law was known for his humility and reaching out to others in Christian love.

Rev. Robert Montgomery Brearley (1998-2018)

After his call to St. Simons Presbyterian Church began in 1998, Rev. Brearley became known throughout the community for his kindness and grace when connecting with others in the congregation, general community, and other ministers. The church supported the planting of a second Presbyterian Church on the island in 1997 and relationships with other island pastors resulted in ecumenical services such as Holy Week worship, Easter sunrise service, and other shared worship services.



***Rev. Robert
Montgomery Brearley***

Under Rev. Brearley's guidance, the church became a mentoring church for several pastors just graduating from seminary. Associate pastors under Rev. Brearley's mentorship included Deanie Strength, Troy Hauser-Brydon, and Alan Dyer (who later became co-pastor then pastor/head of staff of St. Simons Presbyterian Church). Later, Rev. Annie Franklin Arvin would serve as associate pastor under Rev. Alan Dyer's leadership. The number of church staff during Rev. Brearley's tenure also grew to meet the needs of the congregation and the church's organization moved from oversight by the Presbyterian Women Council to leadership by congregation-led ministry teams.

Rev. Brearley led the congregation through The Great Recession of 2007-2009, which coincided with the completion of a new children and youth building with Sunday School and activity rooms, as well as a new administrative building containing staff offices and meeting spaces. He encouraged congregational support of the General Assembly's stance on homosexuality to ensure that all people were welcome to attend worship and become members of St. Simons Presbyterian Church regardless of sexual orientation. He formalized a strong history of benevolent giving by the church with the policy to tithe all undesignated donations. Additionally, Rev. Brearley began the tradition of celebrating our Presbyterian Scottish heritage with a Kirkin' o' the Tartan service, which has continued since its introduction in 1999.

Rev. Alan Folsom Dyer (2016-2022)

Rev. Alan Dyer arrived in the summer of 2013 as an associate pastor. He quickly became known for his sermons, both content and delivery. In 2016 the session met with Rev. Brearley and it was agreed to petition the Savannah Presbytery to have Rev. Brearley and Rev. Dyer serve the church as co-pastors. Rev. Brearley and Rev. Dyer shared duties of pastor, moderator, and head of staff for the next two years until Rev. Brearley's retirement on June 30, 2018.



***Rev. Alan
Folsom Dyer***

Rev. Dyer led the Heart & Soul capital building campaign to renovate the sanctuary and the Ashantilly wing of the church. On October 6, 2019, the congregation began worshiping in the social hall as renovations began. COVID-19 dictated changes: Rev. Dyer live-streamed worship, made continuous adaptations in ways of worship, encouraged the staff to creatively keep activities and ministries alive, and steadfastly kept the members united even though they were physically apart. During the COVID-19 crisis, financial giving by church members increased. Rev. Dyer suggested a Covid Relief Fund, which offered financial help by distributing \$207,327.05 to those critically impacted. After over a year's absence, the congregation returned to worship in the church's renovated sanctuary on March 28, 2021.

At the core of Rev. Dyer's deep religious ethic was "being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the community." America's turmoil over race relations arrived locally in spring of 2020 with the shooting murder of Ahmaud Arbery. Community leaders and pastors, including Rev. Dyer, bonded together to call for mercy, justice, and peace. Although racial unrest and demonstrations were happening in cities throughout the United States, it was nationally recognized that the involvement of the pastors was instrumental in maintaining peace in Glynn County. Rev. Dyer participated in the formation of racial equity meetings, which continue today.

In 2020, when church in-person attendance was limited due to COVID-19, 15 people joined St. Simons Presbyterian Church. The new member count rose to 20 in 2021 and, once the church reopened for worship, there were 57 new members in 2022. On January 30, 2022, Rev. Dyer announced he had been called to Spartanburg, SC. His final Sunday was February 27th. On that day, with Rev. Dyer moderating, the session met and welcomed 9 new members to our church family.

The Pastors

Through God's calling, its pastors have led St. Simons Presbyterian Church from a distant vision of a church to a strong body of worshipers grounded in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rev. Dr. James Gillespie helped turn the vision into reality with the construction of the church. Rev. Dr. Ben Moore developed and organized the congregation into the body of Christ. Rev. Dr. John Law helped grow the congregation and the church as the island population increased dramatically. Rev. Bob Brearley grew ecumenical relationships with the island pastors and led the church through crises in the denomination and in the world. Rev. Alan Dyer guided the church through a worldwide pandemic, a racial crisis in the community, and strengthened a philanthropic culture and membership growth.

Although our pastors have led the congregation, it is God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer who we worship and glorify. St. Simons Presbyterian Church has been blessed with imperfect human pastors, who were undoubtedly perfectly placed to listen and lead through times of plenty and times rife with confusion and challenges. The warm, sweet spirit of our congregation has nourished its pastors, and our pastors have prayerfully led us through this thing we call the Christian life. We rejoice in the assurance that God is leading us to the individual already prepared for us as the next pastor of St. Simons Presbyterian Church.

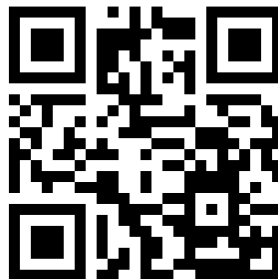
Members' Recollections

75th Anniversary Video



For over three quarters of a century now, St. Simons Presbyterian has been a community of faith that laughs together, cries together, plays together, eats together, serves together, worships together, and places its trust fully in God together.

Scan the QR code below to hear stories from our past, shared by members of our congregation, or visit www.sspres.org/early-days.



Informed by the Present

"St. Simons Presbyterian is a church home where all of God's children can come to learn, love, and serve. We accept one another just as we are and find ways to surround and support each other in times of joy, sadness, stress, or concern. It is a place where we receive the grace of God and then pass it on to others both inside and outside of our home."

-Bob & Molly Macaulay



Congregational Profile

Current membership data is presented in the following section. St. Simons Presbyterian Church utilizes a database called Realm in order to maintain its records. Below is a breakdown of membership demographics as of October 2022. It is a snapshot of the current makeup of the congregation.

Current Membership Data

| Active Members | Active Male Members | Active Female Members |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 616 | 245 | 371 |
| Affiliate Members | Affiliate Male Members | Affiliate Female Members |
| 27 | 14 | 13 |
| Snowbirds/ Seasonal | Children of Members | New Members to date Oct 2022 |
| 74 | 124 | 17 |

Congregational Survey Participation

A congregational survey completed in September 2022 was conducted to gather additional information about our church family (see Appendix 1). We had 354 people respond, which represents 118% of our average weekly worship attendance of 300. The demographic details of survey participation are as follows:

- 66% female / 34%male
- 80% over the age of 55
- 40% have been members for over 20 years
- 99% white ethnicity
- average household income of \$139,556
- 51% with post graduate studies/graduate degrees and 48% having some college degree

In 2017 a congregational survey was conducted with 145 individual responses. At the time of the survey, St. Simons Presbyterian Church had 608 members and an average weekly worship attendance of 230. Although less comprehensive, the 2017 survey reflected similar participation demographics to the 2022 survey.

- 68% female / 32% male
- 77% over the age of 55





Both surveys suggested that the membership composition was split fairly evenly between long-term members more than 15 years (with 51% in 2017 and 49% in 2022) and those who had been members less than 15 years. In 2017, 19% of survey respondents had been members less than 5 years, and in 2022 that portion rose to 26%. Annual data for new members is as follows:

- In 2019, there were 34 new members.
- In 2020, there were 15 new members (COVID-19 year)
- In 2021, there 57 new members (lingering COVID-19)
- In 2022, there were 17 new members as of November 1

Involvement of youth and young families has been highlighted as having great potential for membership growth and fulfillment. Both surveys showed that members were primarily attracted to St. Simons because of the pastors, their preaching, and worship style. However, both surveys reflected the respondents' belief that there is a need for membership growth and participation. Also pinpointed as essential growth areas are an expansion of enrichment in youth programming, community outreach, and ministries for the aging and disadvantaged (particularly the widening disparity of the island community and the county/mainland). By identifying these areas for growth and by participating in community nonprofit programs and activities, the membership is acknowledging the opportunity for more involvement in sharing resources and talents, and in demonstrating Christ's love for all.

Congregation Speaks

Congregational Survey Results

"You can feel the spirit and generosity within our church."

- Focus group participant

During the months of August, September, and October 2022, church members were given the opportunity to express themselves during focus groups sessions and through the Holy Cow! Consulting Congregational Assessment Tool. Participation in the opportunities for feedback was overwhelming during this Season of Transition at St. Simons Presbyterian Church. The Transition Profile of the survey (see Appendix 2) shows that over 90% of the respondents are not “thinking about exploring other churches” and over 80% of the respondents reported that they are interested in additional involvement in the church during the transition process. The morale index statement “the whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible” resulted in over 90% agreement. These combined results demonstrate that the members are pleased with the vitality and direction of their church, eager for involvement, and ready for its future path.

According to this survey, approximately 69% of our members are satisfied with our church. This sense of contentment does not imply however, that the members do not have ideas, hopes and future goals for their church and themselves. Across all age groups, members expressed the need for additional attention and “energy” devoted to the following goals:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
- Expand outreach ministries that provide direct service to those living on the margins of society (i.e., homeless, immigrant, transient persons).
- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc.)



Focus Group Findings

It was vital that we included the congregation as much as possible in the self-study process, so we hosted two separate focus groups on two different days, receiving input from members (see Appendix 4) . Participants enjoyed a meal and then responded to specific questions. Responses from the focus groups clearly complemented and expanded upon the top priorities gleaned from the survey.

What is our church's vision for ministry as a whole?

When focus group members were asked to define our church's vision for ministry, 12% of the responses indicate members are not aware of our church's vision. In recent years, the congregation has been involved with community outreach through Day of Service, BRIDGE and mission trips as well as providing financial support through the community and global missions ministry teams. This sense of serving others is vigorously reflected in the focus group responses identifying the church's vision as one of outreach (23%) and being the "hands and feet of Jesus Christ" (20%). When asked about the church's vision for ministry, the overarching theme voiced by our congregation is a strong sense of love for God, Jesus Christ, our church family and others in the world.

Where do you see our church's strengths?

Compared to other questions asked during focus groups, "Where do you see our church's strengths?" received the most responses. A review of the responses reveals our congregation is our greatest strength (20% of the responses). It is noted we are a "congregational led church" that supports each other as a family and is receptive to generational and social diversity. Yet, it is not a "closed" congregation as new members are welcomed (10%) and nurtured. Our children are loved, enjoyed and made to feel safe in the church/family environment. Responses also indicate our members recognize our hard-working staff and pastoral care. An additional strength is our interaction with the community. The church offers a wide variety of opportunities to be involved with serving, participating in activities and attending events. In general, our greatest strength is our congregation, which is healthy and active.

What are our challenges and concerns?

While focus groups identified our congregation as a strength, it is obvious we are challenging ourselves to continue to grow. Participants (18%) are ready to accept more diversity in the areas of race, age and culture. In recent years the young adult population with children has grown and responses suggest there is a desire for this trend to continue. To be successful, there needs to be well-planned and well-organized programs not only for our older members but also for our younger families. In addition, it is essential to incorporate more robust programming for our youth (middle & high school). Responses indicate a challenge facing the congregation is helping people stay connected to the greater church by welcoming them (12%) and finding ways for members (especially new members) to actively serve (9%) on committees and as church officers. Whether it is through preaching, Christian education or group activities, there is a desire to be led by and learn more through the Bible.

What would you like to see in our church that isn't present now?

By assessing what is not present in the life of the church, group participants expressed their desires for new initiatives. Almost a fourth of the responses (22%) indicate a desire to have special interest groups. They include a broad range such as classes on managing finances, support for caregivers and a singles ministry for specific age groups. There is some interest in having a contemporary service and mixing more upbeat music with the traditional hymns during worship. It is recognized that we are a growing church and this is resulting in the need for additional staff (e.g., associate pastor, help with the children's program, a full-time facilities coordinator, paid help in the kitchen during events). Many of the responses addressing the needs of the church are broad and varied. As a result, they could not be grouped in a single category; 20% of the responses are classified as "other." Thus, while the congregation and church as a whole are identified as "healthy," opportunities to support the church's growth to ensure sustainability are apparent and vital.

How do you feel the church is helping you grow in your faith?

There is strong evidence (31% of the responses) that our members grow their faith through the formation of relationships. People's faith is affirmed and grows when they connect to each other. Our members also increase their faith by serving others; as one individual stated, "I feel accepted and loved in whatever service or study I'm involved with." Responses also indicate faith is grown through the traditional methods of Bible study, small group learning opportunities and Sunday school. Overall results indicate our members' faith is grown through interaction with others (small group, service and study).

How do you see yourself fit into the life of the church?

The results of this focus question indicated it is important for people to feel connected to each other and the church. Being involved with the church's activities offer opportunities to build relationships and attachments with each other. Thus, 45% of the responses identified "service" as a way to be involved, form relationships and feel connected. This was confirmed as another 18% of the responses targeted "building relationships" is another way to "fit in." The importance and the benefit of getting involved was expressed by one participant: "When you are asked, say 'Yes,' even if you are uncomfortable. God will show you the way."

Our survey indicated that people are interested in small groups. Why would you be interested in attending small groups?

Focus group participants viewed being involved in a small group as another way of bonding together. While establishing relationships is often a theme in the results of other focus questions, participants noted small group situations provided an opportunity to "dive a little deeper" and establish more personal, intimate friendships. The advantage of small group settings is the ease of arranging logistics. The responses suggest an interest in a wide variety of meetings centered around common interests (e.g., neighborhood dinners, new members, book clubs, singles, scripture study, young adults without children, people with significant life changes). The overarching theme of attending small groups is the desire to stay connected to each other within the church.

Additional Concerns

Although not specific to our focus group findings, there are other concerns that have been identified by members that need attention. It is essential that our congregation address and develop a plan for action to ensure the future vitality and welfare of our members, their families, and the church. These concerns are as follows:

- the ability of our current youth program to attract and retain youth (along with their families)
- finding adult volunteers to help with our expanding children's programs
- evaluating our senior population, incorporating them, serving them, and offering what they need to feel loved and supported by our church;
- exploring ways to incorporate the younger adults into leadership roles as the older members transition out of leadership
- a review of our church organization to develop more interaction and relationships between the Session and Diaconate
- fulfilling the desire of members to grapple with difficult topics such as injustice, prejudice, etc.

The breadth and depth of engagement with faith formation can both be enriched, according to those who participated in the focus groups and congregational survey. While St. Simons Presbyterian Church resoundingly gets relationships “right” in the current model of church life, there is a hunger for even more diversity and connection in the form of small groups. The question raised seems to be “who are we missing?” and “how are we feeding and growing those who venture our way?” Both are excellent questions and we the church are listening for answers.



Youth Speak

What began as a wonderful two-year-old preschool class for our son turned into a church family we love being a part of. The congregation and leadership at Saint Simons Presbyterian have welcomed our family from the first time we walked through their door. More importantly, it has held us in firm embrace. The spirit of this church allows us to share our experiences and offer the same open arms to others.

- Stephen & Whitney McConnell

3rd-5th Graders Speak

I keep coming to church because of...

Donuts, bingo, play, the pastors, the community, everybody knows each other, the many events, new stuff, tell cool stories about God, Ms. Frieda, KidzFellowship, and the playground.

Our new pastor should be....

Someone who cares, generous, relates stories to real life, honest, humorous, human, someone good with kids, a visitor to sick and old people, smart, tells cool meaningful stories about God, kind, and loving.

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is proud of this group of enthusiastic older children. The majority of their responses center around the love and learning that takes place when they attend church. This group infuses the lifeblood of the church with fresh eyes and a good dose of energy! Donut lovers though they are, they find a sense of safety and community within the intergenerational congregation that knows them by name and helps them grow in their faith. They recognize that their church is all about people and their interactions with them, striving to live a more God-focused life.



6th -12th Graders Speak

"Being able to experience God as a group. I experience Him myself, but when I'm with other people I experience Him even more and in a different way."

"Church means a place of peace and rest for me."

"It gives me a lot of opportunities, especially to get out in the community, like the Day of Service or Mission Trips. Exploring something that isn't my life but someone else's life."

"I have good friends here."

"Being with good people is so important. Like, you are what you eat. Being with good people makes you good people."

Through conversations with our middle and high school youth, we learned they place high value on socialization. At school they have developed friendships with students of different races and different backgrounds, who share the same moral and ethical value system, and our youth would like to include these friends in their St. Simons Presbyterian Church youth program. When asked about programming, our youth enjoy activities that are fun, exciting, and adventurous. They are open to change including a contemporary worship service. Our youth enjoy interacting with and serving others; as stated during their conversations, "This is a way to see God in action."



Congregational Activities & Ministries

We think of our church as the foundation of a Village we live in, enjoy, and utilize daily. Our church is open to all and welcomes everyone with smiling faces, open arms and friendships in faith.

- Bob & Nancy Harper

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is a buzzing beehive of opportunities for the faithful. Many of these are fellowship and many are services. St. Simons Presbyterian Church loves to eat together. Informed by our Lord's love of breaking bread at table with all sorts, good meals are often our backdrop for the faith. Below, find a myriad of ways St. Simons Presbyterian Church hosts and participates in faithful living.

Worship Services

SEPTEMBER–MAY

8:30 am & 10:30 am

JUNE–AUGUST

10:00 am

Special Worship Services

- Kirkin' o' the Tartan
- Ash Wednesday
- Maundy Thursday
- Good Friday Service + Community Luncheon
- Easter Sunday
- Pentecost Sunday
- Bluegrass Sunday
- SSPC Anniversary Celebration
- World Communion Sunday
- All Saints Sunday
- Reformation Sunday
- Advent Services
- Christmas Eve
- Longest Night
- Epiphany
- Children's Sunday
- Youth Sunday

Music Opportunities

- Chancel Choir (adults)
- Chancel Ringers
- Children's Choir
- Early Music Ensemble
- Chancel Ensemble
- Youth Ensemble
- Bluegrass Band

Spiritual Enrichment

- Adult Sunday School
- Men's Bible Study
- Ladies' Bible Studies
- Book Clubs
- Savannah Presbytery School of the Laity

Christian Education (Prek-5th)

- KidzWorship Prek-2nd
- SSPC PreSchool Program year-round
- Kidz Crew Wednesdays
- Kidz Fellowship 3rd-5th graders
- Vacation Bible School
- Worship & Art Camp
- Advent Festival (intergenerational)
- Lent Event (intergenerational)
- Children's Sunday
- Children's Musical
- Fall Festival
- Children's Choir/Chimes
- Savannah Presbytery Summer Camps
- Blessings of the Backpacks
- Parents Night Out

Youth 6th-12th

- Youth Sunday
- Youth Devotional @ Chick-Fil-A
- Youth Group Meetings Sunday
- Summer Mission Trip
- Live Nativity

Young Adult

- Young Adult Fellowship

Mission/Outreach

- Island Concert Music Series
- RISE quarterly magazine
- Community Messiah Concert
- BRIDGE environmental groups
- Hunger Action Team
- Days of Service
- Angel Tree
- Manna House
- MAP International
- Hand in Hand of Glynn
- Caroling on the Trolley
- PAL mentoring at Altama Elementary
- Thanksgiving Breakfast by men of the church
- Clothing collections for Magnolia Manor

Presbyterian Women

- 3 Monthly Circles
- Christmas luncheon
- Good Friday community luncheon
- Monthly offering for Savannah Presbytery and local non-profits

Congregational Care

- Grief Group
- Muffin Ministry
- Meal Ministry
- Note Card Ministry
- Hand & Heart Quilting
- Flower Ministry
- Sonshine for the Soul
- Hospitality/Welcome Ministry
- Ushers/Greeters
- Hospitality Ministry Teams as needed after a memorial

Congregational Life

- Wednesday Night Suppers
- Try Something New
- BINGO
- Who Dealt? Bridge Club
- Snowbird Luncheon

Outside Groups Using Church Facilities

- Al-Anon weekly
- Coastal Georgia Historical Society
- Ivy League Book Club
- Girl Scouts Troop 072
- Frederica Academy
- Pirates of the Spanish Main
- Oak Forest Subdivision Homeowners Association
- Hand in Hand of Glynn



Organization of the Church

Session Leadership

The organization of St. Simons Presbyterian Church's leadership seeks to accomplish five goals:

1. Lift up Session's role as the strategic and spiritual leaders of the congregation.
2. Empower more decision making at the committee/team level.
3. Emphasize the Diaconate's role in leading congregational care and compassion ministries.
4. Clarify lay and staff leadership of specific ministry areas.
5. Foster deeper congregational involvement and participation across all St. Simons Presbyterian Church ministries.

Councils and Ministry Teams

The chart includes two layers of organization under the Session. It identifies seven councils (Business Affairs, Education and Formation, Worship and Music, Nominating, Mission and Outreach, Congregational Life, and Membership), which constitute the "umbrella" organizations. Ministry teams are organized under each council. Each elder is assigned to serve on a specific council throughout their three-year term of service. Ministry teams are open to any and all church members who desire to serve on them.

Council Leadership

Each council is led by three elders serving in a rotating leadership capacity over their three year terms on session:

- Elder 1 (first year of term): Secretary
- Elder 2 (second year of term): Vice Chair
- Elder 3 (third year of term): Chairperson

Elder Responsibilities for Councils

While the specific ministry teams within each council may meet regularly throughout the year, many councils may only need or choose to meet 1-2 times per year. As such, the elders' role of leading councils will consist of three key responsibilities.

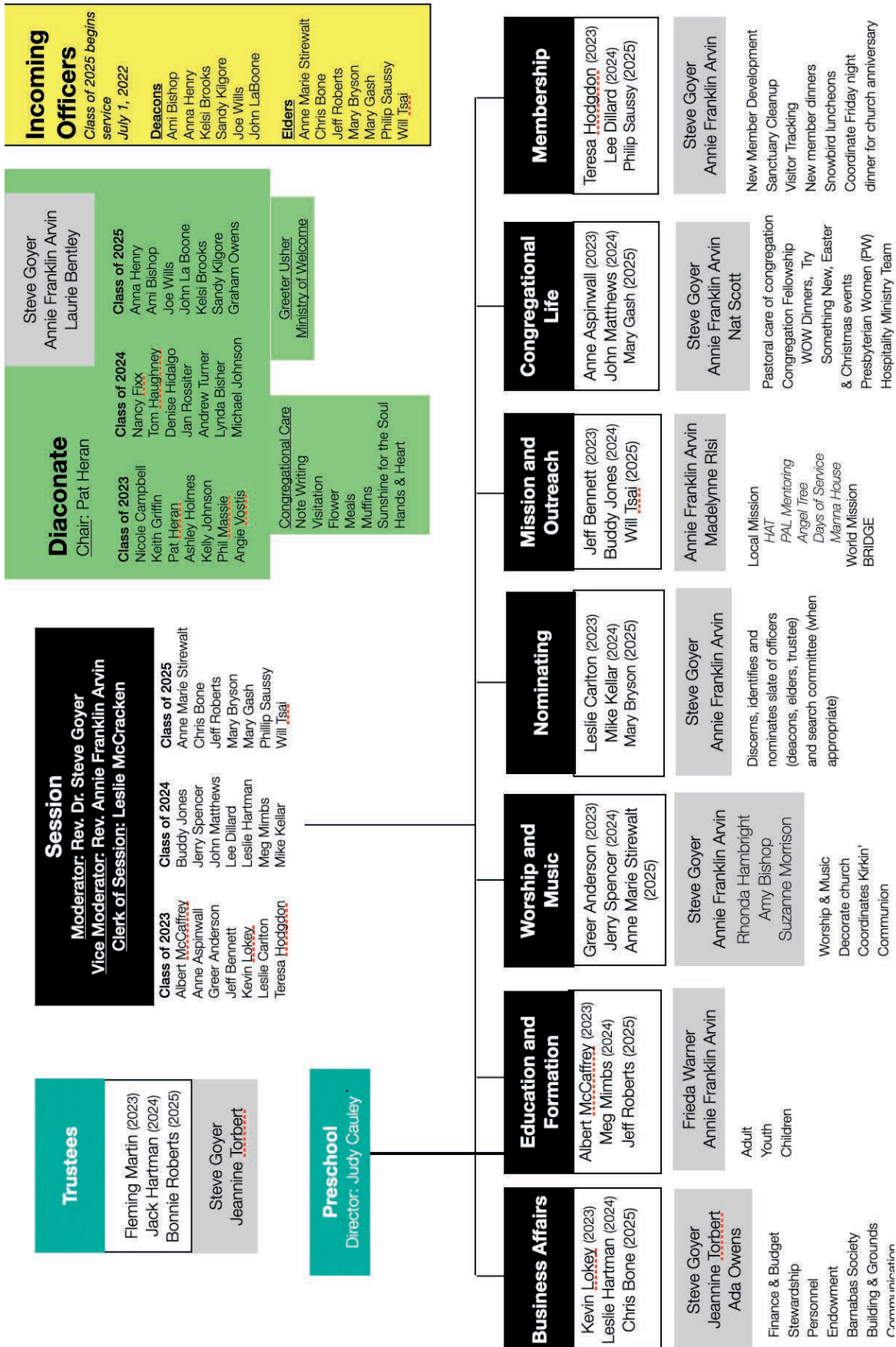
1. Know what is happening in the individual ministry teams of their council. Stay in contact with the leadership of ministry teams, and identify ways they need support, etc.
2. Know what is happening in the overall work of the council. Be aware of the "big picture" and help lead overall strategic thinking for the council's overall ministry area.
3. Write a monthly report for the Session. Be the primary communicator to the Session about the ministry happening within the assigned council.

Elder and Deacon Service on Ministry Teams

Elders are welcome (and encouraged) to also serve on individual ministry teams — regardless of whether it is a team within their council or not. For example, the chair of the Business Affairs Council may have a real heart for serving on the Hunger Action Team or writing cards for congregational care. Additionally, deacons will continue to be encouraged to provide officer participation in and leadership of individual ministry teams.

Organizational Chart

From St Simons Presbyterian Church Leadership Handbook 2022-2023.



Church Staff & Responsibilities

Ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, Full-time

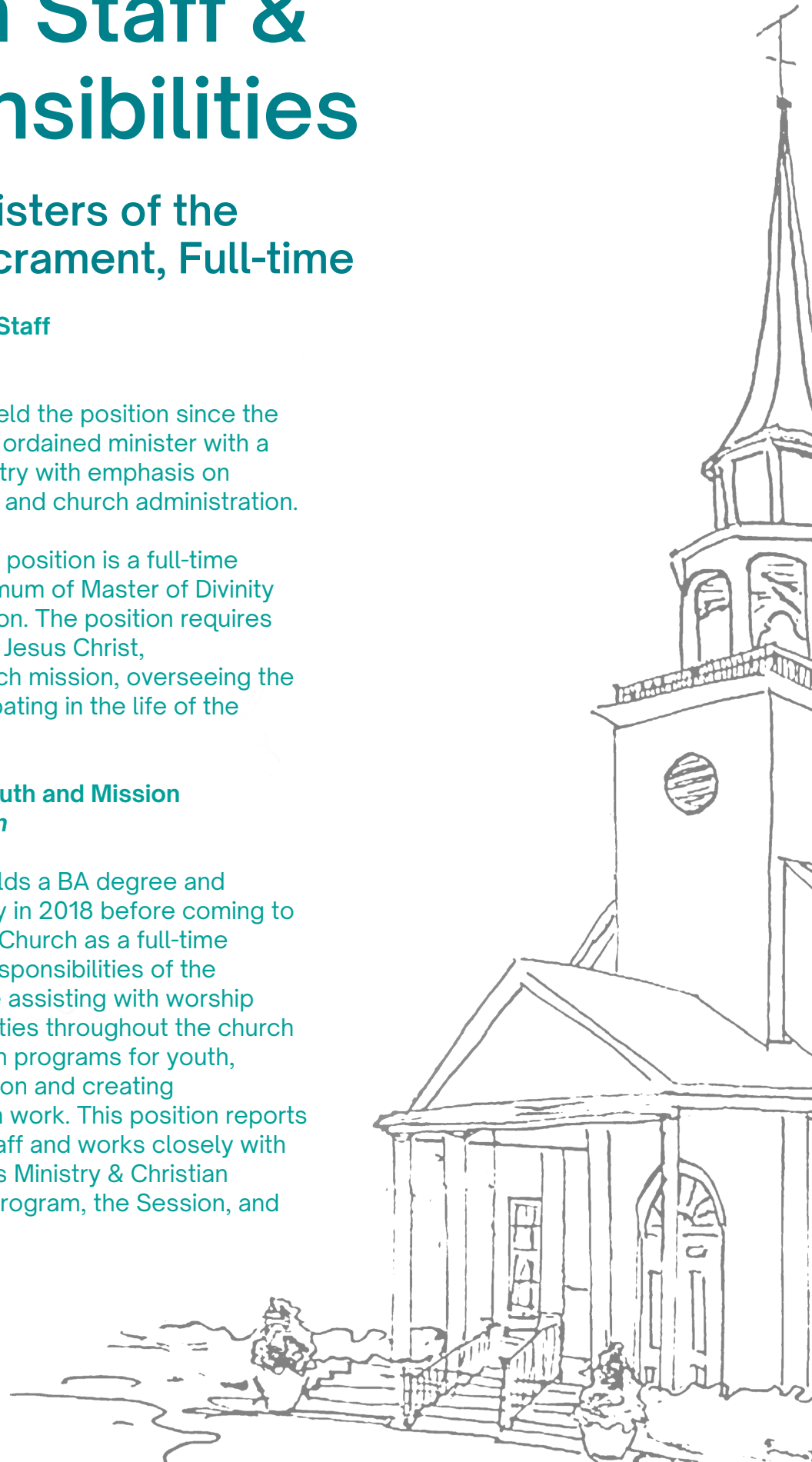
Interim Pastor/Head of Staff ***Rev. Dr. Steve Goyer***

The interim pastor has held the position since the spring of 2022 and is an ordained minister with a Doctoral degree in Ministry with emphasis on preaching, pastoral care and church administration.

The pastor/head of staff position is a full-time position requiring a minimum of Master of Divinity and reports to the Session. The position requires preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, communicating the church mission, overseeing the church staff, and participating in the life of the church and community.

Associate Pastor for Youth and Mission ***Rev. Annie Franklin Arvin***

The associate pastor holds a BA degree and graduated from seminary in 2018 before coming to St. Simons Presbyterian Church as a full-time associate pastor. The responsibilities of the associate pastor include assisting with worship services and other activities throughout the church with special emphasis on programs for youth, engaging the congregation and creating opportunities for mission work. This position reports to the pastor/head of staff and works closely with the Director of Children's Ministry & Christian Education, the BRIDGE Program, the Session, and Diaconate.



Program Directors, Full-time

Director of Christian Education and Children's Ministry - *Frieda Warner*

The Director of Christian Education and Children's Ministry has a BS and a M.Ed and has been at St. Simons Presbyterian Church in various positions since 1992. The position reports to the pastor/head of staff while working closely with other staff members and the Session's Education and Formation Ministry Council. The primary responsibility of this position is spiritual formation for every age from infants to mature adults with a focus on children's ministry. Programs planned and directed include Sunday School, Wednesday programming for children, Bible and book studies, VBS, camps and church wide events such as Advent, Lent and the Fall Festival. In addition to overseeing weddings held at the church, this Director also supervises the nursery staff and the Children's Music Director.

Director of Music – *Rhonda Hambright*

The Director of Music holds a Bachelor of Music degree and has broad knowledge, experience, and leadership in music at St. Simons Presbyterian Church since 2008. The Director reports to the pastor/head of staff and works with the Worship and Music Ministry Council of the Session. The duties of this Director include coordinating with the pastor and other staff members on worship services; directing the Adult Chancel Choir, the Chancel Ensemble, the Early Music Ensemble, and the Youth Ensemble; training individuals for programs including supervising paid and volunteer leaders; maintaining the church's musical instruments; and assuring the provision of resources for routine and special music events. In addition, the Director supervises the Handbell Director and the Director of the Children's Choir while performing the duties of the Artistic Director of the Island Concert Association and developing local musicians through private instruction.

Director of Congregational Life - *Nat Scott*

The Director of Congregational Life has a BFA degree with extensive experience developing ministries designed to provide opportunities for personal and spiritual growth for all age groups. This position pays particular attention to the ministry for older adults. In addition, the duties include managing and overseeing all aspects of the church kitchen; leading Bible Studies, adult Sunday School lessons, and Presbyterian Women's Circle lessons; and assisting the pastors with pastoral and congregational care activities. This Director reports to the pastor/head of staff, works closely with the Session's Congregational Life Council, the Deacons' Congregational Care Committee and staff and congregation volunteers.

Director of Preschool - *Judy Cauley*

The Director of Preschool has been a full-time manager and administrator of the preschool since 1993. She has expertise working with teachers, staff and parents to assure a safe and high quality education program for young children. This Director has a close working relationship with the members of the Education and Formation Council as well as other St. Simons Presbyterian Church Directors.

Administrative Directors, Full-time

Director of Finance and Administration - *Jeannine Torbert*

The Director of Finance and Administration is a full-time position responsible for managing and overseeing all financial functions, including day-to-day financial operations and long and short-term budgetary planning, to facilitate the availability of resources to fulfill the church's mission and goals. The Director has a BBA in Accounting, has been in the position since 2015, reports to the pastor/head of staff and works closely with the Business Affairs Council.

Director of Communications - *Ada Owens*

The Director of Communications has degrees in Marketing and Philosophy along with extensive experience with innovative computer systems. Using her technical and creative skills, she is responsible for initiating and coordinating communication across all ministry areas including weekly newsletters, annual church publications and numerous and varied special projects. The position reports to the pastor/head of staff, works with staff and congregation members including the Elders and Deacons, and supervises the work of the Worship Technology Specialist/Livestream Technician. The current Director has held this position since 2018.

Program and Administrative Staff, Part-time

Parish Associate for Visitation – *Rev. Laurie Bentley*

The parish associate for visitation holds a Master of Divinity degree. The parish associate is a part-time position reporting to the pastor/head of staff, who is responsible for providing visitation and pastoral care to the aged, sick, homebound, grieving and those experiencing other significant life events. The parish associate also leads a Grief Group twice a month. The current position was filled in the Fall of 2022.

Organist – *Amy Bishop*

The organist has a BA degree in music with numerous years of experience in organ and piano both in church and other venues. Responsibilities of the organist include selecting music for Sunday services, funerals, and weddings; accompanying the choirs; and participating in special music programs and events. The organist reports to the pastor/head of staff and works closely with the Director of Music, the Children's Music Director and the Worship and Music Council. The organist has served St. Simons Presbyterian Church since 2008.

Handbell Director – *Suzanne Morrison*

The Handbell Director has a BS degree, extensive experience in bells and chimes music and in working with handbell musicians from the congregation and community. She also is responsible for care of liturgical arts. This Director has held this part time position since 2004 and reports to the Director of Music while working with the Worship and Music Council.

Children's Music Director - *Iris Ellis*

The Children's Choir Director holds a BA degree, reports to the Director of Christian Education and Children's Ministry, and works closely with the Director of Music. This Director strives to foster a love of God and sacred music in children ages pre-K to 5th grade while strengthening the relationships between parents, families and the ministry of the church. Specific duties include Wednesday afternoon music programming and periodic special music events. The current Director has held this position at St. Simons Presbyterian Church since 2021.

BRIDGE Mission Program Director - *Madelynne Risi*

The BRIDGE Director position is supervised by the pastors and is responsible for coordinating the BRIDGE Mission Program, a mission and ministry program that enables students to build relationships with Jesus Christ, fellow participants and new friends in faith while experiencing and inspiring diversity, grace and ecology. The primary role of this part time position is to plan, coordinate and organize the program, which includes implementing registration, engaging ministry partnerships with community agencies, and planning and providing service activities for attendees. The BRIDGE Director also works to expand learning and spiritual growth among students, chaperones and volunteers through worship, fellowship and community service. The current Director has held this position at St. Simons Presbyterian Church since 2016.

Worship Technology Specialist/Livestream Technician - *Doug Marshall*

This position has been filled by the current technician since Fall 2022. With degrees in music and education and an expert knowledge of the church's audio/visual technology, this technician enhances worship services and other programs while working with the Director of Communications and the worship leadership team.

Facilities Maintenance/Building Coordinator – *Walter Lynn*

The Facilities Maintenance/Building Coordinator is responsible for maintenance and repairs needed for safe and proper functioning of the building and grounds. Additional duties include assuring the appropriate setup and breakdown of tables, chairs, and other items needed for funerals, church meals, and special events; ordering kitchen and cleaning supplies; overseeing grounds and cleaning services; and coordinating with the Building and Grounds Committee. The current Coordinator reports to the pastor/head of staff and has been in the current position since 2014.

Administrative Assistant – *Donna Purdy*

The Administrative Assistant position is part time and is responsible for providing general administrative support to the church with a special emphasis on answering phone calls; greeting and assisting those entering the administrative office; creating the weekly bulletins; managing membership information and church activity schedules. The Administrative Assistant has a bachelor's degree and reports to the pastor/head of staff while working closely with staff and congregation members. The current Administrative Assistant has held the position since 2021.

Financial Profile

For 76 years the generosity of the members of St. Simons Presbyterian Church has allowed us to live out the mission of being a faithful witness to God's steadfast love both in Glynn County and beyond. In worship, mission, study, and fellowship, we are a community of faith that has and continues to strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ for one another and for the world around us.

Stewardship

Like most churches, St. Simons Presbyterian Church solicited pledges from members to cover operating expenses for the subsequent year. There was little planning and organization given towards the stewardship campaign every year. For decades, pledges represented only 70%-80% of the forecasted budget, yet we always met or exceeded the budget.

In 2019, St. Simons Presbyterian Church established a Stewardship Committee responsible for the strategic, long term view of stewardship in the congregation. The goal of the Stewardship Committee is to create and sustain a culture of generosity where members are well informed about the church's finances, actively participate in budget drives and capital campaigns, and fully understand the link between the congregation's mission and resources.

As a result of the Stewardship Committee formation and the congregation's consistent response, stewardship is a lifestyle, not just a season or annual campaign.

St. Simons Presbyterian Church Pledging Trends

| COMMITMENT TOTALS | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Households Pledging | 176 | 169 | 184 | 190 |
| Total of Commitments | \$847,457 | \$916,420 | \$918,498 | \$1,311,260 |
| Percent of Budget | 76% | 82% | 83% | 109% |

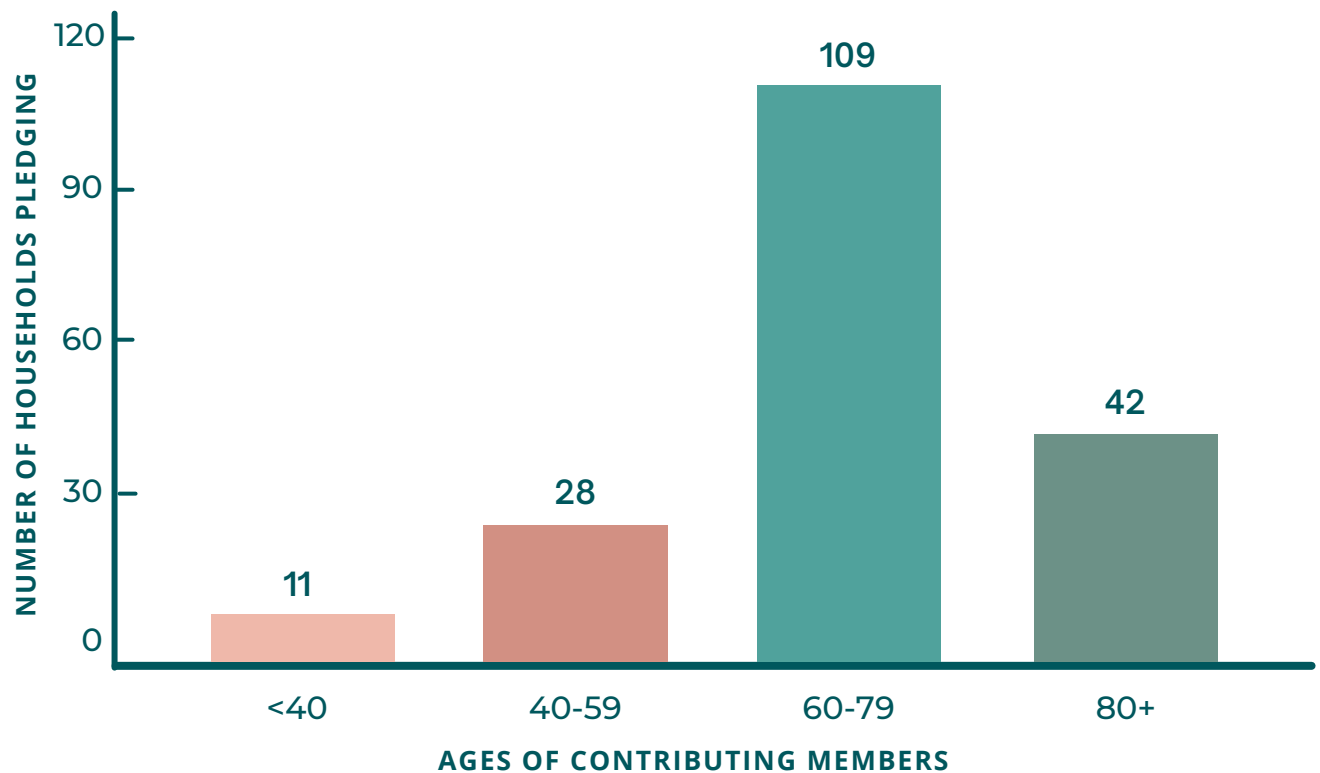
Annual financial stewardship by our members is steadfast and consistent. In 2021 the annual budget was approximately \$1,100,000. Despite the pandemic, our members gave over \$1,400,000 resulting in a surplus of over \$300,000.

In 2021 the median commitment was \$2,930 and grew to a median commitment of \$3,550 in 2022. In addition, in 2022, the top ten commitments made-up 41% of the budget and the top 25 commitments made-up 55% of the budget. While not unusual in comparison to many peer congregations, these numbers reflect an opportunity to improve the distribution of support among more of the members.

The majority of pledges comes from the 60-79 age bracket, representing an opportunity to engage and encourage younger members to pledge and engage with the church financially.

As of October 2022, we expect to meet or exceed our FY2022 budget of \$1,200,000.

Household Pledging Profile



Endowment Fund

In addition to annual stewardship giving, supporters of St. Simons Presbyterian Church can contribute to an endowment fund so that their generosity can impact the church in perpetuity.

Our endowment fund provides members and friends with an opportunity to practice stewardship of accumulated resources to fund local and international ministries.

Contributions reflect contributors' gratitude for God's blessings.

The fund is organized into three categories: missions (internal and external); ministry (music, worship, education); and capital needs (buildings, facilities). An Endowment Committee makes recommendations to the Session for appropriate distributions from growth and income. Approximately 4 to 5% of the total value of the endowment is distributed on an annual basis.

As of September 30, 2022 the Endowment fund had a market value of approximately \$1,900,000. An annual distribution of more than \$35,000, representing 1.5% of the fund's value, was approved on July 15, 2022. Of this total, more than \$30,000 were undesignated funds that were allocated and approved by the Session.

Organizations benefiting from endowment distributions include:

- Hand in Hand of Glynn
- Golden Isles Veterans Village Initiative
- Montreat Conference Center
- Blue Skies Ministries
- Habitat for Humanity of Glynn County
- St. Simons Presbyterian Church BRIDGE Mission Program
- Community and Global Missions Ministry Programs

Barnabas Society

Named for Apostle Barnabas who sold his possessions and gave the proceeds to the community, the Barnabas Society honors members and friends of St. Simons Presbyterian Church who have named the church in their estate plans. The Barnabas Society provides flexibility in the size and amounts of gifts as well as anonymity of the donor, if desired. The sole goal is to sustain church ministries and community outreach through estate giving.

Budget

As we continue to grow in membership and ministry, the 2023 operating budget has been increased to \$1,400,000 allowing us to grow in our generosity both within and outside the walls of St. Simons Presbyterian Church.

The budget covers both the operational costs of St. Simons Presbyterian Church and the many ministries and missions the church supports. The 2023 budget (see Appendix 7) is divided into the following areas:

- Administration and ministry support - 8%
- Discipleship - 13%
- Congregational life and ministry - 14%
- Mission and outreach - 20%
- Buildings and maintenance - 22%
- Worship and ministry - 23%

Ministry Investment

OPERATING BUDGET: \$1,400,000

This year's operating budget reflects a \$200k increase from our FY2022 budget. As our church grows in membership and ministry, this budget allows us to grow in our generosity both within and outside the walls of our campus. Details about the types of activities included in each operating area are provided on the opposite page.



| | |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 8% | Admin & Ministry Support |
| 13% | Discipleship |
| 14% | Congregational Life & Ministry |
| 20% | Mission & Outreach |
| 22% | Buildings & Maintenance |
| 23% | Worship & Music |

*A detailed church budget is available in church office at any time upon request.

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is a generous congregation. The operating budget includes generous support for local and international organizations. In 2021, our church's benevolent giving total was \$371,064, which represented 25% of the 2021 total operating income. Funding sources for benevolent giving in 2021 are detailed below:

- \$140,395 from Operating Budget - 38%
- \$137,509 from Other Giving & Special Offerings - 37%
- \$93,160 from Endowment Distributions - 25%

Deacon's Fund

The majority of grants or donations made by St. Simons Presbyterian Church are approved by the Session or the Endowment Committee. However, there are times when pastoral staff require flexibility to meet urgent financial needs. The Deacon's Fund is a fund that can be used in these situations at the discretion of the pastors. At any given time, the Deacon's Fund balance is between \$25,000 - \$50,000. While not a large line item, this fund is an important tool available to allow immediate responses to critical needs of members of our community and church.

Covid Relief Fund

During 2020, amid global and local shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Stewardship Committee made a strategic decision that demonstrated the generous spirit of St. Simons Presbyterian Church. The Stewardship Committee suspended the focus on stewardship activities in pursuit of donations to create a fund to help those in the local community who suffered financially from the pandemic.

St. Simons Presbyterian Church members immediately responded and within one week, \$100,000 was raised for the newly formed St. Simons Presbyterian Church Covid Relief Fund.

Individual grants of \$250 were given out to those in need with over \$190,000 donated by church members and distributed to the local Glynn County community. Assistance provided by the St. Simons Presbyterian Church Covid Relief Fund helped 385 individuals and families.



Conclusion

St. Simons Presbyterian Church enjoys consistent and generous support from our members and supporters. Whether it be annual giving to support our core mission and ministry, support of a special initiative such as the Covid Relief Fund or testamentary gifts to the Endowment Fund, our members embody the spirit of stewardship and generosity. This generosity, often leading to a surplus, allows us to be generous as a church to our members in need or local community and to international organizations. And it appears that generosity will continue for the foreseeable future allowing us to responsibly expand our mission and ministries.

Despite this sound financial footing, there are a few areas which represent opportunities for growth and improvement. Pledging and giving by members younger than 60 could be increased both in percentage of members within that age bracket and the median giving amount. The Endowment Fund also represents an opportunity for growth. It is likely that a larger percentage of church members would consider St. Simons Presbyterian Church in their estate planning if specific initiatives are instituted to increase member awareness of the Endowment Fund.

Finally, because St. Simons Presbyterian Church is blessed with the opportunity to give anywhere between 200,000 and \$400,000 a year outside of the church—either because of a budget surplus or regular distributions of endowment proceeds—a more specific process to discern God's will in the distribution of these funds could be implemented.

With the guidance of our next senior pastor, St. Simons Presbyterian Church is poised to spread God's love through the generosity of St. Simons Presbyterian Church and its members.



Community Profile

Location and Population

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is located on St. Simons Island, one of 14 barrier islands located on Georgia's Atlantic coast. Four of these barrier islands, including St. Simons, Little St. Simons, Jekyll, and Sea Island, are located in Glynn County (one of Georgia's six coastal counties). The mainland portion of Glynn County includes the city of Brunswick. Collectively, these barrier islands and Brunswick are often referred to as the Golden Isles. St. Simons, Jekyll, and Sea Island make up three of the four total Georgia barrier islands that are accessible by car and have experienced extensive commercial development. The other is Tybee Island, which is located off the coast from Savannah. The remaining barrier islands, largely protected from development, remain accessible only by boat.

Glynn County, located about halfway between Savannah, Georgia, and Jacksonville, Florida, is more populated and commercially developed than the four counties that border it. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Glynn County had nearly 85,000 residents as of July 2021. Of this total, nearly 17,000 are residents of St. Simons and Sea Island. The mainland city of Brunswick, connected to St. Simons by a 4-mile causeway, has a population of just over 15,000 within the city limits. When the

more highly developed mainland residential and commercial areas immediately adjacent to the city are included, the population total increases to more than 33,000. Glynn County's remaining population of 35,000 lives mostly in unincorporated suburban and rural areas on the mainland.

Tourism and History

The Golden Isles are a major tourist destination, attracting visitors from across the United States. The area hosts more than 3 million visitors annually and experiences about \$2 billion in economic impact from this activity according to the Golden Isles Convention and Visitors Bureau. Beaches, golf courses, natural beauty and other resort amenities, combined with a thriving local restaurant scene, numerous historic sites, and unique natural ecosystems are the primary attractions for visitors. In the past several years, the Golden Isles have received numerous recognitions that include:

- Travel + Leisure's World's Best Islands in the Continental U.S.
- U.S. News' Best Beaches in the U.S.
- Conde Nast Traveler's Best U.S. Islands

The natural beauty and recreational opportunities of the area are matched by a rich history. The first known European settlement on St. Simons Island was the establishment of the Spanish Mission San Buenaventura de Guadalquini



sometime between 1597 and 1609. The Spanish period lasted until 1684 when settlers retreated to Florida following attacks by English pirates. Fifty years later, in 1736, Fort Frederica was established by the English on St. Simons to serve as a southern outpost against Spanish encroachment into the newly established colony of Georgia. This site is now preserved and managed as Fort Frederica National Historic Site. By the beginning of the 1800s, the island consisted of several plantations, which remained in operation until the Civil War and the end of slavery. Plantation house ruins at Cannon's Point and preserved slave cabins at Gascoigne Bluff provide glimpses into this era. Boats, however, remained the only means to access the island until 1924, when the causeway that connects St. Simons to the mainland by road was completed.

Although the tourist industry has played a role on St. Simons since the late 1800s, most of the development on the island from the mid-1940s through the 1990s was residential in nature. People moved to St. Simons to raise their families and eventually retire. The real estate boom of the 2000s brought with it a shift to the demographics of the island with increasing numbers of retirees. By 2020, nearly 40 percent of the population was 65 years and over. This is nearly triple the proportion for the state of Georgia as a whole.

Demographics and Schools

St. Simons also has comparatively fewer younger people than Brunswick and the state of Georgia as a whole. According to data from the 2020 American Community Survey, those less than 18 years old represented only 12 percent of the population of St. Simons. In contrast, the proportion of the population in this age group is twice as high in Brunswick and statewide. Assuming a consistent distribution across those years, about 115 children in each specific age or grade level live on St. Simons. With these demographic challenges in mind, St. Simons Presbyterian Church has remained committed to providing a strong, dynamic children's ministry that continues to attract children and their families to the church. It also continues to operate a half-day preschool, which currently serves 95 children and their families.

Two public elementary schools are located on St. Simons, and both school zones extend into areas of downtown Brunswick. All of Glynn County's public middle schools and high schools, in contrast, are located on the mainland. Private schools located on St. Simons include Frederica Academy, which offers Pre-K through 12th-grade classes, and St. Simons Christian School, which offers Pre-K through 8th-grade classes.

Similar to the nation as a whole, St. Simons and Glynn County reflect the growing economic disparity within our country's population. St. Simons is a relatively affluent community with a median household income of \$91,677, which is almost 40 percent higher than the state median income of \$66,559. In stark contrast, the median household income in the city of Brunswick is \$27,471 - less than one third of the median income on St. Simons and less than half of the statewide median. The poverty rate in Brunswick is over 35%, compared to the statewide rate of 14%, and the poverty rate for those in Brunswick under 18 years is more than 50%. The economic disparity between St. Simons and Brunswick, particularly as it relates to children, is a fact that St. Simons Presbyterian Church cannot ignore in its call to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

Race and Ethnicity

The congregation of St. Simons Presbyterian Church is predominantly white. This closely matches the racial makeup of St. Simons, which is more than 92% white according to the 2020 U.S. Census. As of 2020 less than 2 percent of the island's population was black. Behind this fact lies a story of demographic change that has taken place on St. Simons since World War II. Before the war, African-Americans were the majority of the population and lived in historic communities that had existed since the days of slavery on the island. The construction of a causeway from the mainland in 1924 combined with the military housing that was built on St. Simons during the war began the trend of white families moving to St. Simons as permanent residents, which continued with the pattern of suburban-style development in the postwar years. The history of St. Simons Presbyterian Church is linked to this demographic shift when First Presbyterian Church in Brunswick saw the opportunity to plant a Presbyterian church on St. Simons following the end of World War II.

In contrast to St. Simons, the population of Glynn County as a whole is relatively diverse. People of color make up nearly 28% of the population, of which African-Americans represent the largest proportion at more than 24% of the total population. The Hispanic population is a growing segment of our community as well, representing about 7.5% of Glynn County's total population as of 2020. The city of Brunswick itself is nearly 60% African-American, more than 9% Hispanic, and only slightly more than 30% of its residents are white or Caucasian.

Recent Events

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, another event that looms large in the recent history of our community is the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and the process by which the men who committed this crime were eventually brought to justice. These events began with the death of Arbery, a black man, at the hands of three white men on February 23, 2020, in a subdivision just outside of Brunswick. The local district attorney's office and local law enforcement initially failed to pursue charges against these men, but the incident gained national exposure in May with the release of a video that captured the shooting. Set against the national backdrop of a reckoning with racism in our institutions and massive, sometimes violent, protests, the tensions in our own community were high.

Fortunately, the overall mood in our community remained peaceful, and the protests against our local law enforcement and prosecutors did not erupt into violence. Many of our local clergy and community leaders, across both racial and political lines, came together physically, gathering outside the courthouse in support of the call for justice for Arbery. During the eventual indictment of the three men on murder charges and later, at their trial in November 2021, the Glynn County Courthouse was the site of daily prayer vigils attended by a cross section of the population. With the guilty verdicts for all three men at the trial's conclusion, the tensions straining the fragile peace in our community were relaxed. Although this particular injustice was eventually corrected under the due process of law, many of the issues surrounding racial inequality such as disparities in economic and health outcomes continue to be areas of focus for organizations working to create positive changes in Glynn County.



Glynn county clergy, including Rev. Alan Dyer and Rev. Kate Buckley, and members of the community gathering on the courthouse steps together for prayer during the Ahmaud Arbery trial.

Community Speaks

St. Simons Presbyterian Church strives to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ by being present in the local community. During the COVID-19 crisis, church members demonstrated Christ's love to 385 neighbors by contributing more than \$190,00.00 to a Covid Relief Fund specifically created to offer financial help to those unemployed or underemployed, to families and children without food or resources and to those threatened with mounting expenses. From the recent responses from the community survey, it's clear the need for such assistance continues in our community.

In an attempt to build relationships not just with people but with nonprofit agencies, twice a year on the Day of Service, members volunteer time and energy completing any task that would help that nonprofit. Ecumenical relationships with other pastors strengthened when turmoil reigned over race relations in the spring of 2020 with the local Brunswick shooting murder of Ahmaud Arbery. Community leaders and pastors bonded together to call for mercy, justice and peace. Although racial unrest and demonstrations were happening in cities throughout the United States, it was nationally recognized that the involvement of the pastors was instrumental in maintaining peace in Glynn County. Racial inequity, poverty, homelessness, and the need for food are all areas that the congregation would like to become more involved with to continue reaching out to others.

In September 2022, a survey was sent to 37 organizations with whom St. Simons Presbyterian Church partners in our local community and presbytery in order to better understand our church's relationship with them and how we could make those partnerships better. This survey received 25 total responses. A selection of the responses to the survey question is included below. (A complete report of survey responses can be found in Appendix 8.)

Community Survey

Narrative: How is the ministry of St. Simons Presbyterian Church characterized by the community's responses? How are we living out our mission as the hands and feet of Christ?

1 What are the present challenges facing our community?

"The continued disparity between have and have not, black and white, church groups, the islands and the mainland. The divide creates both problems and opportunities"

-Glynn Clergy for Equity & Faithworks

"Environmental Injustice, sea level rise, social injustice"

-One Hundred Miles

"Homelessness, poverty, crime, food & housing insufficiencies, lack of transportation."

-Family Connection Glynn County

2 What is St. Simons Presbyterian Church's role in those challenges?

"Working to bridge gaps and helping the various factions appreciate and love one another is a call to discipleship and witness. Continuing to celebrate your uniqueness while maintaining strong ecumenical relationships offers hope and healing."

-Faithworks

"To have Christ and to share His love to all people by seeing the need and responding to it."

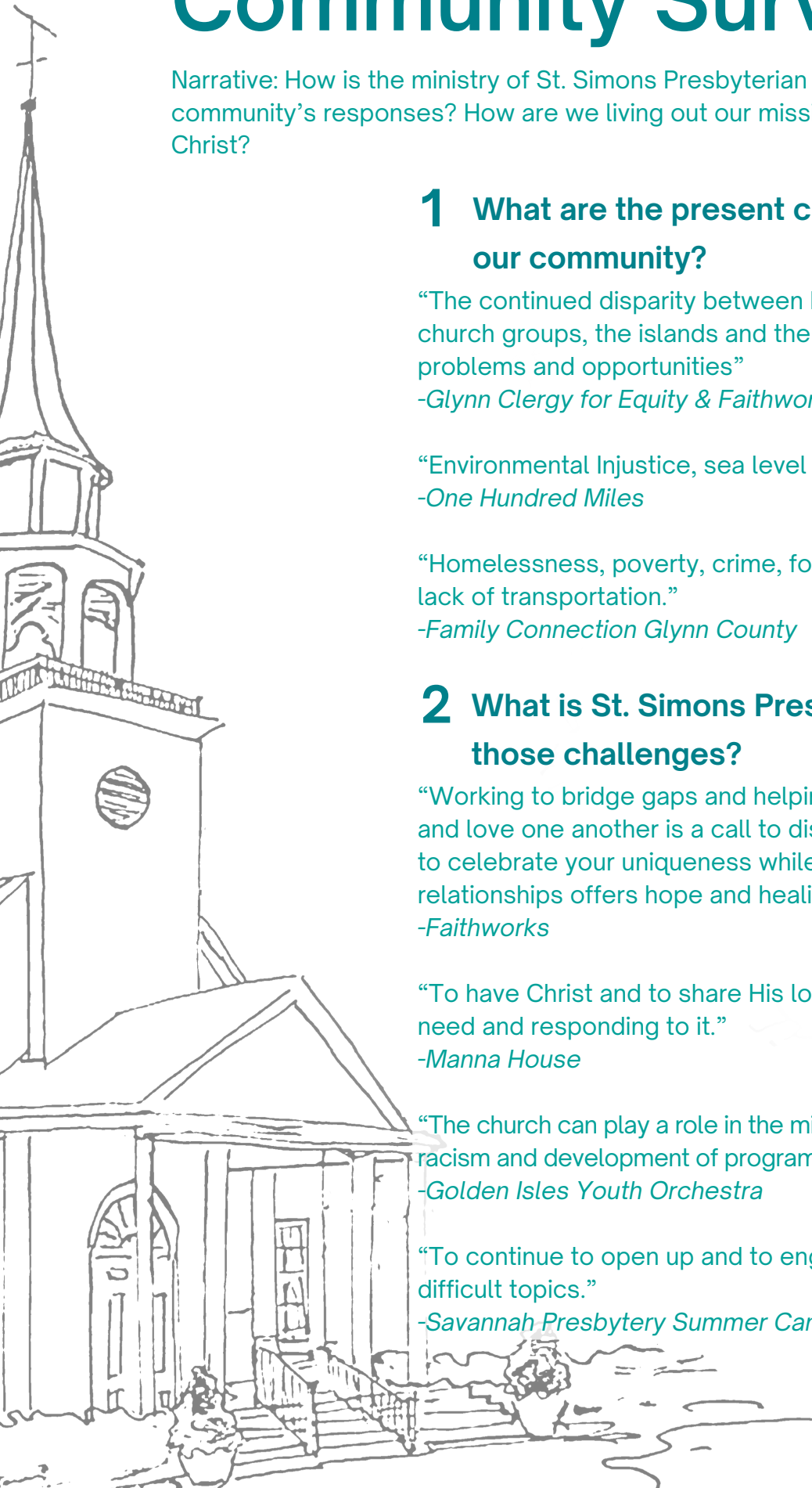
-Manna House

"The church can play a role in the ministerial community's examination of racism and development of programming to address it."

-Golden Isles Youth Orchestra

"To continue to open up and to engage in conversations about difficult topics."

-Savannah Presbytery Summer Camps



3 How has St. Simons Presbyterian Church worked with you in the past?

“Many of the gaps in our community are smaller because you have been willing to step in.

-Faithworks

“St. Simons Presbyterian Church has been a lifesaver not only throughout the last few years but continual. Both through giving and through prayers, our staff and volunteers know and feel valued to continue to do what often feels impossible, fighting for abused children in a very broken foster care system.”

-CASA

“I know I can call with a specific need, and you always answer the need or request.”

-Sparrow’s Nest

“The people of St. Simons Presbyterian Church, through their genuine character and love of Christ seen in action, helped our director by giving her employment early in her recovery but, more importantly, helped to shape the once close-minded atheist into the Christian woman she is today because of St. Simons Presbyterian's witness, encouragement, and love. St. Simons Presbyterian Church holds a place both personally in the heart of our director and in the heart of Grace House.”

-Grace House

4 How would you change (or not) your relationship with St. Simons Presbyterian Church?

“We’d like an opportunity to come and share with your small groups some specifics of our ministry. I am sure there is much we do that you would be blessed to know that you are a part of in our shared kingdom work.”

-Faithworks

“We would love to come and tell St. Simons Presbyterian Church about who we are and what we do to give a better understanding of our importance to this community.”

-International Seafarers

“I’d like to invite St. Simons Presbyterian Church’s PAL volunteers to be a part of our school events.”

-Goodyear Elementary

“We’d like to see an increase in direct volunteer opportunities that provide relationships to be built between church members and the women of Grace House. We believe that St. Simons Presbyterian Church thrives in witnessing the gospel and character of Christ to those who need him and hope to work together in creating more opportunities for the women at Grace House to receive the light carried by members of St. Simons Presbyterian Church.”

-Grace House

Community Partners



Second Harvest
of Coastal GA



Christ Church
Frederica



Family
Connection, Glynn



Golden Isles
Veterans Village



Golden Isles
Youth Orchestra



Presbyterian
Homes of Georgia



Glynn County
Clergy for Equity



Burroughs-Molette
Elementary School



Safe Harbor
Children's
Advocacy Center



FaithWorks
Ministry



One Hundred
Miles



Grace House of
Brunswick



Communities of
Coastal GA
Foundation



Savannah
Presbytery



International
Seafarers' Center



Keep Golden
Isles Beautiful



Manna House



Altama
Elementary



Goodyear
Elementary School



St. Simons Rotary
International



CASA of Glynn
County



Habitat for
Humanity

Inspired for the Future

*But I will hope continually and will praise you
yet more and more.*

(Psalms 71:14 NRSV)



Congregational Goals

The Congregation Assessment Tool was used by the Pastor Nominating Committee in its effort to identify the top priorities for the congregation of St. Simons Presbyterian Church. These survey results clearly identified four areas of focus that should continue to receive attention as the church looks to the future.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
- Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society. (i.e. homeless, immigrant, transient persons)
- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc).

Although not official vision statements, each of these priorities provides meaningful direction to the continued growth and development of the church. Discussions during focus group events that followed the completion of the congregational survey confirmed these sentiments.

Reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. (1 Thessalonians 3:12 NRSV)

St. Simons Presbyterian Church has continued to attract new members during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the current period of pastoral transition. Since 2019, 126 have joined the church. And even at Rev. Dyer's last worship service, 11 new members joined the church. This is a testament to St. Simons Presbyterian Church's strength, even during periods of uncertainty and change.

Our congregation knows that attracting new members and promoting engagement is essential to the continued strength and growth of St. Simons Presbyterian Church. As a church whose hope is to attract new members from different age groups, backgrounds, and life circumstances, our members are aware of both our strengths and our challenges in carrying out this priority.

Heal those broken by life circumstances.

The church understands that the process of healing is holistic, not limited to only the physical, mental, or spiritual parts of ourselves. We seek to follow the example of Jesus, who spent his ministry on earth as a healer of bodies, minds, and spirits. Sometimes this means delivering someone a meal to provide nourishment for the body, and at other times this means giving someone a ride to reduce their stress or anxiety. Prayers both with and for those in need are the continual work of the church.

Provide direct services to those living on the margins of society.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.
(Matthew 25:40 NRSV)

The outward focus of St. Simons Presbyterian Church ministries has continued to strengthen, especially in recent years. The church provides not only financial support to frontline service organizations that address issues of hunger, homelessness, and addiction, but also encourages our members to contribute their own time and effort to these ministries. The financial relationships and opportunities for service have been well-documented in the congregational profile section of this report, and discussions during our focus group sessions reaffirm the importance of these ministries as St. Simons Presbyterian Church moves forward.

Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
(Matthew 18:20 NRSV)

At first glance, St. Simons Presbyterian Church provides ample opportunities for fellowship. Wednesday Night Suppers, PW Circle Meetings, Sunday School classes, Try Something New events, and Youth Group are among the many regularly scheduled activities that bring members of our congregation together. Despite these many opportunities, our congregation recognizes that providing ways to develop these deeper connections requires continual effort.

Because we have a relatively high percentage of newer members, the desire to form relationships with other church members is a higher priority. Another factor is the separation and feelings of isolation that may have developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, we find ourselves living in a society that seems to ask us to lead increasingly busy lives at all ages and stages.



Member Comments



Pat Heran

"I'd like for us to find a way to become more of a diverse congregation. We embrace different cultures and we embrace different styles of worship. I think that would really enhance how we live as the hands and feet of Christ."



Taylor Brooks

"As we grow together and realize what we need, I think there's going to be even more intentionality in the future to do small groups and to really connect to each other on a heart level instead of just on a Sunday morning experience, because that's what we crave."



John LaBoone

"There's a growing Hispanic population here and I think we need to reach out to those people who traditionally may not have been Presbyterian but would benefit hugely from the treasures that Presbyterianism offers and especially that this church offers."



Arthur Owens

"I just hope our new pastor is funny and keeps this church running well."

Scan the QR code for more feedback from members of St. Simons Presbyterian on why they love this church and what their hopes are for the future ministry at SSPC. sspres.org/about



Visions for Leadership

St. Simons Presbyterian Church recognizes that leadership of the church is a responsibility of the congregation, the pastor, and other church staff. As we move forward during this transition, eventually leading to a relationship with a new pastor/head of staff, it is essential to identify the aspects of leadership that will lead to continued growth and satisfaction with the church.

The Executive Summary developed for St. Simons Presbyterian Church using the Congregation Assessment Tool survey results identified three attributes of church leadership that correlated closely with overall satisfaction.

Our leaders will be representative of the membership.

The congregation of St. Simons Presbyterian Church wants our church leadership to truly reflect the diversity of our membership. A mix of women and men representing a variety of age groups and lengths of membership will allow the congregation to see themselves accurately reflected among the church officers and other church leaders.

Our leaders will provide adequate opportunity for consideration of different approaches to important decisions.

From time to time, St. Simons Presbyterian Church will need to make important decisions as a church. Whether the issue at hand is the decision to start a building campaign, a reorganization of staff responsibilities, or the introduction of a new ministry program, our congregation values an intentionally deliberative process that values thoughtfulness and prayer over haste.

Our leaders will show a genuine concern to know what people are thinking when decisions need to be made.

The creation of this self-study for St. Simons Presbyterian Church's pastoral search has revealed the extent to which our congregation wishes to be engaged with the process. The extraordinary level of participation in the congregational survey (118% of average weekly worship attendance) and the robust response to the focus group events (92 total participants) should reinforce the commitment that our church leaders need to make toward listening when important decisions are being made. In all situations, church leaders must provide a meaningful opportunity for input rather than a process that merely checks the box.



Our Next Pastor/ Head of Staff

The perspective of St. Simons Presbyterian Church and our Pastor Nominating Committee is that God already knows who our next pastor will be. The process of discernment is a mutual recognition on the part of both the PNC and the pastoral candidate that God has called to serve our church. In order to reach this point of recognition, the PNC has been charged by the Session to prayerfully conduct this self-study and learn about the collective hopes our church has for its next pastor.

Through the congregational survey and its open response question concerning the next pastor, the PNC is seeking to develop a picture of the person who will fulfill this call. In addition to the church goals and visions for leadership already mentioned above, some of the desired qualities for our next pastor (as identified in the Vital Leader Profile) include:

- excellent preaching
- a perspective that honors the historic roots of the faith
- a focus on Christian education that reaches people at every age
- and stage of life
- creating a family life ministry that is effective in attracting parents, children, and youth
- directing the energies of the congregation toward renewal of the
- community in which the church is located

The qualities identified in this report are mirrored, in many ways, by the open-ended responses received from the congregational survey regarding the qualities they would like to see in our next pastor (see Appendix). The most frequent responses mentioned a desire for dynamic, knowledgeable, scripture-based sermons. Another frequent group of responses identified personality traits such as kindness, compassion, humility, and friendliness as priorities. Woven throughout the responses was a desire for the next pastor to make deeper connections, not only with members of the congregation, but also with the larger community. Additionally, our congregation expressed the hope for an energetic leader with the skills to successfully manage a very busy church with a very busy staff.

Hope for the Future

The data collected as part of this church study suggests St. Simons Presbyterian Church is a healthy church. One of the reasons for that is we are a congregation willing to evaluate ourselves and work towards improvement, thus helping to ensure the future vitality and welfare of our church.

Children and Youth

With the growing membership of young families with children, more adult volunteers are needed to help with expanding children's programs. Our current youth program is not attracting new young people. As students reach middle school age, they are enrolling in other youth programs. Some members have expressed the concern that if our students go to another church, their parents may follow. A detailed evaluation of our youth program would be beneficial.

30–40-Year-Old Adults

This age group is a growing membership in our church. For the vitality of the church, it is essential they take on active leadership roles whether it be as church officers, committee members, or mentors for our youth.

Senior Members

Pastoral care of all members is an integral part of our church culture. "Care" includes assisting our older members and helping them meet their physical and emotional needs. It is crucial that our seniors continue to be included in church activities and feel needed, valued, loved, and supported by our congregation.

Organizational Structure

Our session, diaconate, and committees are very active but often work independently from one another. It may be beneficial to review our administrative structure and find ways to form closer working relationships and establish more effective, efficient church organization.

Community Relationships

In recent years, being "the hands and feet of Jesus Christ" has become a part of our congregation's culture. In reaction to recent world, national, and local events, many members have expressed a desire to reach out to others and to grapple with difficult topics such as race, injustice, and prejudice. St. Simons Presbyterian Church has a history of reaching across socioeconomic, geographical, and racial divides. However, there remains opportunity to establish genuine, lasting relationships across those divides.

Conclusion

Trusting in the plans God has for our church, the congregation has shown up in huge numbers to participate in this self-study. This level of active engagement with providing feedback shows the church is willing and ready to evaluate, listen, and grow. We stand firmly planted, visibly present to our community as a beacon of Christ's light. Because of that grounding, St. Simons Presbyterian Church feels the freedom to be introspective, to grow deep and wide with honesty and integrity. There is a palpable, sweet spirit to this church and a swirling energy that comes from change. It is certainly a time to embrace who we are and simultaneously give ourselves permission to grow into who God is now calling us to be under the leadership of our next pastor.

Approved by SSPC Session November 15, 2022

Approved by the Savannah Presbytery Committee on Ministry December 13, 2022



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Holy Cow! Consulting, Vital Signs for St. Simons Presbyterian Church.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c-uOETPGPR2LXq5yrrRLZiyjb_98TgN/view?usp=share_link

Appendix 2: Holy Cow! Consulting, Transition Summary and Vital Leader Profile.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gzOYgnymEchns42dzBhYAhi95RvCv_8u/view?usp=share_link

Appendix 3: Holy Cow! Consulting, Executive Summary.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xeEz0Kbk13MudNbdNdWfNra-9ZV5pzyo/view?usp=share_link

Appendix 4: Focus Group Questions and Resulting Data.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F2K7ovezPKUoifaR_eRecc19ZhS-fJ77/view?usp=share_link

Appendix 5: Something for Everyone Brochure
https://www.sspres.org/uploads/5/7/7/9/57793339/something_for_everyone.pdf

Appendix 6: St. Simons Presbyterian Church, We are the Church: Stewardship 2021.
https://www.sspres.org/uploads/5/7/7/9/57793339/stewardship_trifold_2021_.pdf

Appendix 7: St. Simons Presbyterian Church, Stewardship 2023: Practicing Gratitude.
https://www.sspres.org/uploads/5/7/7/9/57793339/sspc_stewardship_booklet_2023.pdf

Appendix 8: Community Organization Survey and Resulting Data.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lotQ70qLbCSYgK7MxFp0KoK5-IUdgF9s/view?usp=share_link

Appendix 9: Rise, St. Simons Presbyterian Church Quarterly Magazine.
<https://www.sspres.org/rise-magazine.html>

Scan the QR code for a full list of reports provided by Holy Cow!
or by visiting **[sspres.org/survey](https://www.sspres.org/survey)**
Password: survey



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