

UNITED CHURCH OF
CHRIST

**LOCAL CHURCH
PROFILE**

Sycamore Congregational United
Church of Christ El Cerrito,
California

Settled Pastor

Northern California/Nevada Conference,

The Bay Area Association
November 21, 2023

**LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE
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“God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)



1. POSITION POSTING

- a. LISTING INFORMATION
- b. SCOPE OF WORK
- c. COMPENSATION & SUPPORT
- d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

1a. LISTING INFORMATION

Church name: Sycamore Congregational United Church of Christ
(Sycamore Church) Street address: 1111 Navellier Street, El Cerrito,
California 94530

Supplemental web links: www.sycamoreucc.org

Additional ecumenical affiliations (*e.g. denominations, communions, fellowships*): *N/A*

Conference: NCNC-UCC

Association: The Bay Area Association

UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person (Name, Title,
Phone, Email): Davena Jones

Associate Conference Minister

1320 Willow Pass Road

Concord, CA 94520

davena@ncncucc.org

Summary Ministry Description:

After a long interim process, which was interrupted by the global pandemic, our small but mighty family church has decided on a new direction and structure, which we believe will lead Sycamore Church into a thriving future.

While we had first envisioned this position as best filled with a designated term pastor, we are now feeling that we would be better served by moving directly to a bilingual and bicultural candidate. If this might be you, please contact us so that we can tell you more about our hopes and dreams.

We seek an energetic and personable bilingual/bicultural (Japanese) pastor to walk beside us with imagination in the spirit of Congregationalism. We seek a minister who will continue to honor our history of Japanese ministries and support the present mission of Japanese ministries and language, as we move from being two separate sections, English speaking and Japanese speaking memberships. You will inspire, empower and energize us with your leadership, as you lead the way into a new mission of Justice and Witness Ministries. A minister with savvy technology skills is needed post pandemic.

We have a successful preschool ministry, and a multicultural community. Our new pastor will be able to hire a part-time church administrator upon your arrival to support you and the church in these new directions. Our new minister must help us navigate how to be the church while some of us are still sheltered in place due to the pandemic. The membership has steadily declined for several years and most of the English speakers, who have been the administrative leaders of the entire church for years, have gotten older. Please have patience with us. But be assertive in our need and your work to move the entire church forward in revitalization and growth.

Photographs:





What do we value about living in our area?

Sycamore members say, “I really enjoy living within walking distance of the BART station, of a neighborhood produce market, and the Hillside Nature Area. There are nice parks nearby, close to San Francisco, and a diverse community.”

Current size of membership: 74 active members

Languages used in ministry (*other than English*): Japanese

Position Title: Settled Pastor

Position Duration: Open ended

We are searching for a bilingual, English/Japanese pastor to lead us in our new direction as one church instead of a church with a Japanese and English section. We previously had a Japanese language pastor from Japan, who was here on an R-1 visa and was scheduled to return to Japan in 2025. However, he has chosen to return early so we have two large holes in our leadership team. We are currently hosting a lay minister, also from Japan, who was a member of the congregation.

Compensation Level: Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? Yes

1b. SCOPE OF WORK

(add here the Scope of Work developed by your church using the Call Agreement Workbook)

1. GROWTH AND VITALITY

- Work closely with church leaders and active members to clearly define several outreach efforts that make sense for Sycamore. (Sycamore currently is providing nonperishable food to the Bay Area Rescue Mission, has been donating to the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, and sponsors a Boy Scout Troop who have twice worked to improve church landscaping as part of Eagle Scout projects.)
- Measure and assess how current and new outreach efforts can attract new members to Sycamore, in consultation with the leadership of the church.
- Leadership development. Carrying out the strategic plan by working with the Japanese language lay minister and the church council to implement and/or nurture the new directions, nurturing a one-church model while implementing the justice and witness ministry.
- Community engagement and leading the way for the church to be an ambassador of God's love in the community through engaging with colleges and university, community organizations, ecumenical and inter-faith partners.
- Energizing and deepening the spiritual connections and faith understandings of others in all they do, especially regarding justice.

2. PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

- Preparation and leadership of English language Sunday worship including scripture study, crafting of liturgy and bulletin, sermon preparation, guiding and sometimes finding lay liturgists, planning of music in coordination with musical staff or volunteers, preaching, offering of prayers, etc. Collaborating with Japanese Language lay minister on the Joint worship services.
- Faith formation and vitality through prayer, Bible study, service, identifying helpful resources and opportunities and helping lay persons take advantage of them.
- Pastoral care in collaboration with lay people (recommend Lay Care Team to do regular care so pastor can focus on growth and justice and witness)
- Weddings and funerals for participants in the worshipping community
- Attend Council meetings, standing committee meetings, and preschool board meeting and give leadership as needed to church programs, in collaboration with lay leadership
- Availability to wider community for funerals, weddings, special worship programs, pastoral counseling, listening and referral.

3. OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Administration responsibilities – hire church administrator
- Responsible for supervision of church administrator
- Study and prayer to increase faith and to improve skills so as to lead, teach, preach better

Core Competencies:

Sycamore church completed a survey, “What Gifts are Needed in the One God is Calling to Serve with Sycamore?” Below are the ten gifts they want in their pastor (ranked):

1. Caregiver – Our pastor cares for the members. They seldom miss a need among the congregation.
2. Inspirational Preacher - Our pastor proclaims a word from the pulpit that inspires, grows, and challenges our faith.

3. Teambuilder – Our pastor is the leader but building the team of staff and lay leaders takes much of their time. They follow through on projects, and can be relied on to support the church’s mission and vision.
4. Disciple Maker - Our pastor invests in children and young leaders, guiding them in faith, growth, and encouraging and challenging them to serve God.
5. Leader - Our pastor enjoys taking charge of church projects, willing to be a leader when called upon. Will be responsible for the results, good or bad.
6. Counselor - Because of our pastor's training or experience, they enjoy one-on-one counseling sessions. Dealing daily with the problems of the congregation doesn't drain them.
7. Entrepreneur – our pastor loves dreaming up new ways to grow and support the church. They have a good business sense.
8. Community Pastor – Our pastor is not only the pastor of our church, but also our community. People in the area, businesses, schools, including members of other churches, know them as “Pastor.” They are called on to serve at events in the community.
9. Prophet – Our pastor understands that both the church and world need to hear the voice of a prophet, and they are unafraid to be that voice. They do not avoid the tough issues happening in society and the world. They lead us to be the church (a voice of justice) in the community and world. They work with the church to do justice ministry.
10. Prayer warrior - Some of our pastor’s primary work is behind the scenes, when they take the congregation before God in prayer.

1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

Salary Basis: \$73,099-\$77,349

Benefits: Salary plus Benefits

What is the expected living situation for your next minister: If possible, we would like our pastor to live nearby. The church owns a parsonage/house that is quite close to the church. It is currently being occupied by our lay minister, but may be available when she returns to Japan.

Comment on the residential/commuting expectations for your next minister:
If possible, we would like our pastor to live within five miles of the church.

State any incentives: N/A

Describe peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference: Bay Area clergy participate in special justice actions yearly and worship annually.

If applicable, describe how your church will adopt part-time adjustments in the pastoral schedule to support a minister's bi-vocational employment:
N/A

1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the congregation to achieve.

Due to the paradigm shift in our church and in the country, we would like our pastor to lead us in the implementation of a new justice and witness mission, and guide us in defining and nurturing our new one church model. We seek a pastor who can serve collaboratively, with compassion and patience with our pastoral links in Japan. We need our minister to bring together shared ministry with the Japanese speaking members and English-speaking members, the multiple cultures within Sycamore, and our strong and very talented lay leadership as one church.

Describe how your vision of the minister you are now seeking will assist the congregation in making an impact beyond its walls.

We desire the pastor to lead us in being the Church for our members, the community, and the world by making a tangible difference through justice and witness ministry, as well as our major fundraising events, which are outreach events for the community.

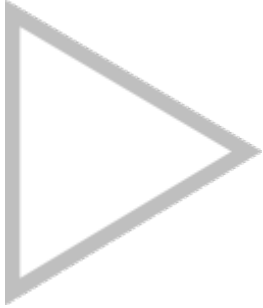
Specify language requirements or culturally specific capacities preferred in a next ministerial leader, and why those matter to the congregation's sense of calling:

Our pastor must have demonstrated awareness and sensitivity of the ways in which the differences of multiple cultures manifest themselves in the local church, and be able to promote oneness in Christ's body. Sycamore is a multicultural, multigenerational congregation made up of Japanese, Thai, Korean, Chinese, African American, and White Americans. In addition, we are theologically and politically diverse. Theologically, we range from conservative to progressive in our beliefs and actions of faith.

Because we have a Japanese speaking congregation who are both recent and longstanding immigrants, and because this congregation continues to grow and fill a need in the community, we feel strongly about committing and continuing to support worship services as well as cultural and fellowship activities in the Japanese language. The way that this will be accomplished by a single bilingual pastor is something that will become clearer when we have the pastor in place. As a search committee we have explored ideas about how this might work, but are very much open to new ideas and approaches.

Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church's neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry* that your next minister will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.

1. Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.
2. Understanding community context and navigating change with a community. Engaging in mission and outreach. Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence.
3. Bringing life to sacred stories and traditions in worship, proclamation, and witness. Leading faith formation effectively across generations.
4. Understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the lifespan. Demonstrating excellent communication skills.



2. WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 NRSV)

Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?

God is calling our congregation to become a ministry of justice in our community and the world, especially in immigration, racial justice (anti-Asian hate), and creation justice. Our justice and witness survey showed there are some interested in the ONA designation. However, we will need our church to grow before tackling this designation, as it has the potential to divide our small church.

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.

Sycamore is in a critical phase in its faith journey with the members of the church council leadership almost entirely consisting of seniors who feel that they cannot continue at the same level of commitment for many more years. We have experienced many transitions in the last two years, as well as the effects of the global pandemic, which bring Sycamore to an even more critical time in its ministry, which requires us to change to grow our historical congregation.

Our church has participated in initiatives around racial justice and immigration. Our leadership assisted in the planning of an interfaith vigil, “Reparations as a Spiritual Practice.” This vigil gave those attending an opportunity to reflect on the Japanese American experience of seeking and achieving reparations. The group uplifted the call for reparations for other communities, including Indigenous and African Americans. In addition to participating in the vigil, our members who were incarcerated during WWII spoke and Sycamore raised funds as well.

Our church participates in immigration initiatives in collaboration with Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI). We have welcomed into our midst a man who was slated to be deported to South America to share his gifts in worship. Sycamore raised funds to support him and his family while he could not work. We have adopted IM4HI as an outreach mission of Sycamore supporting them financially, and in any way we can.

Sycamore members have held a continuous food drive for the Bay Area Rescue Mission from June 2020 to present. This was in response to the lack of food for the pantry at BARM due to Covid-19.

In 2016, Sycamore participated in the New Beginnings work to determine a future vision and direction, one being a bold statement of justice. The new direction is a continuation and fulfillment of that work.



3. WHO ARE WE NOW?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS
- b. 11-YEAR REPORT
- c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS
- d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING
- e. CHURCH FINANCES
- f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Describe your congregation’s life of faith.

For example, what beliefs and commitments are stated in your congregation’s purpose statement or membership vows? How is God most often described in worship liturgy? In what ways would you describe the Holy Spirit in your midst?

Sycamore is committed to the worship of God, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the Sacraments; to realize Christian fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal; to render loving service toward humankind; and to strive for righteousness, justice, and peace.

We recognize the continuing need that our church shall maintain as one of its arms of outreach and concern, a Japanese-speaking ministry.

Our mission is rooted in a legacy of Japanese ministries; rejoicing in the gospel and worship; Reaching out to all people; restoring God's peace by joining the struggle for justice in our communities and the world.

Due to the diverse cultures of the membership, the preschool, and community volunteers, Sycamore uses inclusive language in worship liturgy, sermons and music. Although Jesus is the head of the Church, at Sycamore some members and friends are not necessarily Christian. There is a strong Buddhist following that is respected and welcomed by all.

Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.

1. ***Sycamore (Bilingual and Multicultural) Christian Preschool*** - *Preschool consists of Japanese, Spanish, Chinese and Korean children.*
2. ***Inter-generational Membership*** - *current congregation ranges from 1 to 100 with the Nichigo predominately middle-aged (school age children, college, and parents) and the primarily senior English speakers (senior Japanese-American, Korean American, and senior Caucasian).*
3. ***Racial Diversity*** - *although the current membership is predominantly Japanese American or Native Japanese (many originally from Japan who have decided to immigrate to the US), the active congregation is becoming more diverse with members who are Caucasian, AfricanAmerican, Korean, Chinese, and mixed heritage.*
4. ***Musically Talented*** - *instrumental and vocal capabilities with several members who are professional musicians.*
5. ***Culinary Strengths*** - *several members are professional chefs.*
6. ***Other Artistic Abilities*** - *several professional artists*
7. Sycamore Church is well-known in the Community due to Bazaar, Rummage Sale, and other events. The volunteers are part of the wider Sycamore Church family, which includes family members and friends of current and previous members.

Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.

Our worship will take place in our newly remodeled sanctuary. Due to covid-19 many of our members have not had the opportunity to enjoy worship in the new space. It was designed to allow us to reshape the worship space based on the type of service we are having. We envisioned the college students having the band in the center and worshippers on the outside of the band in a circle. We enjoy our fellowship as we worship together in our separate Japanese and English language, and joint worship services. Our sermons have been described as inspirational and heartfelt. Currently, our worship music consists of traditional hymns.

Describe the educational program/faith formation vision of your church.

Pre-covid, for the children, during services the Christian Education Ministry Team provided “Tomodachi Time,” a time the children spent with their friends’ doing crafts and fun activities around Bible themes. We provide Vacation Bible School in the summer. In the past, we also provided a Soccer camp at the end of VBS, which was led by the former Japanese pastor. We would LOVE to offer this again! We also provided an overnight family camp for fun, fellowship and worship during the summer.

Pre-covid, for adults, we had a bilingual evening Bible study. The participants were both conservative and progressive in their theology, which made conversations interesting. The Japanese speakers continue to have monthly Bible study through Zoom.

During covid, the English speakers had thematic studies through Zoom, such as a Lenten Study that followed the lectionary texts for the upcoming Sunday. We did a study through “The Work of the People,” with Walter Bruggeman, Materiality as Resistance. From this study, we have been doing a continuous food drive for the Bay Area Rescue Mission. Through this study we began to talk about money, the care of our neighbor, and investing in the church. “Earn all you can, save all you can, and give away all you can.” – Walter Bruggeman

Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission.

- *When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?*

We have reviewed our meeting agenda and revised how we do our monthly council meeting. We added worship at the beginning. And, we decided to keep the council meeting under two hours by asking all members to read the packet and reports before the meeting and thus only discussing action items.

- *Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?*

Sycamore's council works well together, making decisions quickly without conflict. These decisions can be made in a meeting or through email. Council meetings have been conducted on Zoom for the past year and a half.

- *Can you provide the next minister with a copy of an organization structure, bylaws and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church's activity and governance?*

Yes. Our organizational structure has been reviewed during our interim process, we have updated our structure and our bylaws. The church's organizational structure is detailed in the bylaws and constitution. They are attached.

We have struggled with trying to determine how we would carry out a new vision for our family size church due to aging and multicultural identity. We spent the first part of the interim period analyzing our strengths and weaknesses, and were brought to realize that we were stretched very thin for the number of people we had, and the number of events we were supporting. We were planning to use the remaining time of our Japanese pastor's ministry to prepare the church for a new period of a single bilingual pastor who could support both of the current congregations, but are now on that path directly. We feel that the emphasis on Justice and Witness, immigrant rights, anti-Asian hate and creation justice will provide us with the new

participants we need. Our current membership is very much in favor of the pursuit of justice and witness goals, but are too tired to be able to take it on without help.

3b. 11-YEAR REPORT

(add here the 11-Year Report developed with the help of your conference staff, UCC Data Hub, and MissionInsite) Attached.

3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church.

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	74	
Number of active non-members:	120	Sycamore’s community extends beyond the worship community and membership. There is a large contingent of volunteers who are current and former preschool parents who participate in the music program during worship, and other events, they cook, bake and fundraise, as well as the many volunteers for the bazaar, rummage sale, and the youth volunteers for bible and soccer camp. This number is an estimate.
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	194	

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	72.1%	✓

Less than 10, more than 5 years:	19.2%	✓
Less than 5 years	8.7%	✓

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-93	94-100
2	1	4	3	9	10	9	15	15	5

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	5%	✓
Households with minors:	30%	✓
Single adults age 35-65:	5%	✓
Joint households with no minors:	46%	✓
Single adults over 65:	14%	✓

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
High school:	25%	✓
College:	70%	✓

Graduate School:	5%	✓
Specialty Training:		
Other (please specify):		

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	26	✓
Adults who are retired:	Majority	
Adults who are not fully employed:		

Describe the range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:

Sycamore adult members have a wide range of occupations ranging from sales to executive management.

Describe the mix of ethnic heritages in your congregation, and the overall racial make-up. Most UCC congregations tend to describe themselves as “diverse.” Yet, the vast majority of UCC congregations are mono-cultural.

What does diversity mean in your context?

We are mostly Japanese American, a Thai and Korean family, a few African Americans, Chinese, Caucasian and mixed races from mixed marriages.

Has your congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one in the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)? Please note the date.

Comment after the exercise:

Sycamore continues to have unofficial conversations around becoming open and affirming (ONA). The congregation is split on this designation, and it would split this small church. We have demonstrated proof of welcoming all in the life and leadership of Sycamore Church. We have called a Black woman who is LBGT. We have welcomed ministers in discernment who were transgender. Some members are not prepared to make a formal declaration and/or don't feel this is necessary. However, a received survey of potential UCC designations showed those who answered the survey are in favor of becoming ONA. As we grow beyond our current active membership, we can see taking up this issue in the future.

3d PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

Complete the following chart. Please leave blank any fields that are not applicable to your congregation.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? (<i>list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff</i>)
Adult Groups or Classes	0	The pastors and moderator
Baptisms (<i>number last year</i>)	0	
Children's Groups or Classes	0	

Christmas Eve Easter	30 adults/4 children (2019) 63 adults/26 children (2019)	The pastors and moderator
Choirs and Music Groups	15 (approximate)	Sycamore Preschool Gospel Choir
Church-based Bible Study	Monthly Bilingual (pre-covid) – 10 Japanese Language Study – 4-5 English Language Study – 3-6	Japanese language pastor and lay leaders English language pastor
Communion (<i>served how often?</i>)	Monthly at Joint worship and high holy Sundays.	The pastors

Community Meals	Always cooking pre-covid! Less often during shutdown but becoming more frequent.	Hospitality team, church members and volunteers
Confirmation (<i>number confirmed last year</i>)	0	
Drama or Dance Program (Shinnenkai)	60+	Lay leaders

Funerals (<i>number last year</i>)	2	The pastors
Intergenerational Groups	1 – Camping (25)	Japanese Language Pastor
Outdoor Worship (Bazaar)	1/year – (500)	The Pastors and Lay leaders
Prayer or Meditation Groups	0	
Public Advocacy Work	1 – IM4HI	The Lay Leaders
Retreats	1	Interim Minister
Theology or Bible Programs in the Community	0	
Weddings (<i>number last year</i>)	0	
Worship (time slot: _____)	9:45am	Japanese Language Pastor
Worship (time slot: _____)	11:00am 1100am (Joint Worship once/month)	English Language Pastor with Worship Team English and Japanese Language Pastor with Worship Team
Young Adult Groups or Classes	0	
Youth Groups or Classes	0	
Other: Annual Bazaar	1,200+	Bazaar committee, hospitality committee, council, pastors, lay leaders, and community volunteers

Annual Rummage Sale	700+	Rummage Sale committee, hospitality committee (lunch for volunteers), council, lay leaders, and community volunteers
Bento Lunch Fundraisers	130-400 approximate lunches sold.	Hospitality committee, council, and church volunteers

Additional comments:

One of the strengths of Sycamore is our ability to raise significant funds for the church. This activity is not just about making money, it is the way we fellowship together. We have a strong work ethic. Although the work isn't easy, we enjoy working together to do our fundraisers, and we work well together. We know our jobs, as we have been doing them for years. Our fundraisers run smoothly.

List all members or regular participants in your congregation who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers. Indicate those with current United Church of Christ Three-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a congregation) or Four-Way Covenants (i.e. serving in a ministry beyond a congregation).

Name	Three- or Four-Way Covenant? <i>(3 or 4 or No)</i>	Ministry Setting	Type of Ministry Role	Retired? <i>(Y or N)</i>
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Rev. Deborah Lee	4-Way	IM4HI	Executive Director	N
Rev. Rodney Yee	No			Y

Rev. Dr. Sharon Thornton	No			Y
Rev. Gayle Dickson	No			Y
Rev. Dr. Barbara Essex	4-Way	United Church of Christ	National Staff	N

If one or more previous pastors or retired ministers currently hold membership in the church, describe their role(s) in the life of the congregation:

Rev. Sharon MacArthur who was a member at Berkeley Chinese UCC will preach at Sycamore from time to time. She was our long time pastor and has a close relationship with the members of Sycamore. She has recently transferred her membership. She has served during funeral services when the pastor was not available. She claims Sycamore as her church. [Note: Sharon MacArthur died recently.] Rev. Dr. Sharon Thornton, Rev. Gayle Dickson, and Rev. Deb Lee have preached at Sycamore. Rev. Deb is the Executive Director of IM4HI. She works with Sycamore in bringing to our awareness issues in the world of immigration. Rev. Rodney Yee has offered his gift of playing guitar and singing, as well as preaching.

List all current staff, including ministers. Exclude the position you are seeking to fill. Indicate which staff person serves as head of staff.

Staff Position	Head of Staff?	Compensation (full time, part time, volunteer)	Supervised by	Length of Tenure for current person in this position
Nichigo minister	No	Full time	Council	Since May 2020 – resigned 6/2023
Secretary	No	½ time	Pastor and Council	Several years
Church maintenance	No	As needed	Pastor and Council	Previously a volunteer position. Paid position as of mid-2022
Janitor	No	As needed	Pastor and Council	Several years

REFLECTION

Reflection: After reviewing the congregational demographics and activities above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's overall ministry?

Sycamore is beloved by its members, preschool parents, and volunteers. They are committed to Sycamore in giving of their time, talent, and treasure. Unfortunately, these have not translated into increased membership nor increased numbers in worship.

3e. CHURCH FINANCES

Current annual income (dollars used during the 2022 fiscal year)

Source	Amount
Annual Offerings and Pledged Giving (including major holidays)	\$95,700
Endowment Proceeds (<i>as permitted within spending policy, such as a cap of typically 4.5%-5% on total return</i>)	\$0
Endowment Draw (<i>beyond what is permitted by spending policy, “drawing down the principal”</i>)	\$0
Fundraising Events	\$40,560
Gifts Designated for a Specific Purpose	\$
Grants	\$
Rentals of Church Building	\$6,182
Rentals of Church Parsonage	\$0
Support from Related Organizations (<i>e.g. Women’s Group</i>)	\$
Transfers from Special Accounts (Transfer from Preschool)	\$36,000
Other (specify): Transfer from AIUEO & Japanese Language Programs	\$2,304
Other (specify):	\$
TOTAL	\$180,656

Current annual expenses (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year): \$212,377
Attach the most recent church budget, spending plan, operating statement, or annual treasurer’s report as shared publicly with the congregation, or – if your church does not pass an annual budget – list current budgeted expenses here.

Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage? **75%**

Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church? No

Is your church 5-for-5, i.e. does it include each of the following contributions during the church year? (*indicate those included during the most recent fiscal year*)

- Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Strengthen the Church
- Neighbors in Need
- Christmas Fund

In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered? If calculated as a percentage of the operating budget, what is that percentage? (*recommended 10%*)

The OCWM is in the budget and voted on every year

What is the church's current indebtedness?

Total amount of loan debt: 0.00

Reason for debt:

Are capital and other payments current?

If a building program is projected or underway, describe it, including the projected start/end date of the building project and the total project budget.

Last year our furnaces both died and were considered too old to repair. After considerable research and consultation, we decided to replace the furnaces with heat pumps. This required a complete upgrade of our electrical system to increase power to the building, which we had known was a long term need. Using some money from our savings, we are in the midst of an electrical/heating project that will cost approximately \$200,000. We hope to have it completed this spring.

The next project for Sycamore will be a kitchen renovation as required by the Contra Costa County Health Department for permitting of the kitchen. The kitchen is used to serve food to the public for the Bazaar and other events that are open to the public. The projected cost of this project begins at \$30,000.

There is also a future plan to resurface the parking lot. The estimate for this project is \$100,000.

If the church has had capital campaigns in the last ten years, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
	N/A	\$	\$	
		\$	\$	

If a capital campaign is underway or anticipated, describe:

Year(s)	Purpose	Goal	Result	Impact
	N/A	\$	\$	
		\$	\$	

Describe the prominent mission component(s) involved in the most recent (or current) capital campaign.

N/A

Does your church have an endowment? Yes, Sycamore has investments in Fidelity Funds

What is the market value of the assets?

As of March 2023, approximately \$535,000.

Are funds drawn as needed, regularly, or under certain

circumstances? No.

What is the percentage rate of draw (last year, compared to 5

years ago)? N/A

Describe draw on endowment, if any, to meet operating budget expenses for the most recent year and the past five years: N/A

At the current rate of draw, how long might the endowment last?

The Fidelity investments should last for many years to come.

Please comment on the above calculations or estimates:

Sycamore's church council voted to use a portion of the Fidelity funds for the salary of the next pastor and the church administrator. Both salaries at conference guidelines. We also have used a small portion to complete the electrical project.

Other Assets

Reserves (savings): \$

Investments (other than endowment): \$

Does your church have a parsonage?

Yes

Fair market rental value of the parsonage:

\$3600 per month (per Zillow)

How is the parsonage used?

Residence for Japanese Language Pastor

Street / City / State / Zip: 917 Galvin Street, El Cerrito,
CA 94530

Finished square footage: 1,347

Number of Bedrooms: 2

Number of Bathrooms: 2

Assessed real estate value: 1M-1.5M

Available for minister residence: Currently occupied by Japanese lay minister. Will be available after she leaves.

Expected minister residence: Not now

Condition of structure, systems and appliances:

Significantly remodeled in 2015

Entity in the church responsible for review and needed repairs:

The Nichigo council has been primarily responsible for monitoring needed repairs, and additions. When something is needed, the church council and Nichigo council between them have decided how it would be paid for. As part of our becoming one congregation, we have recently merged a significant portion of the finances of the two congregations, so that now the church council is responsible for the parsonage directly.

Describe all buildings owned by the church:

Parsonage and church building.

Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church:

N/A

Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?

Entrance to worship space, including restrooms. Downstairs fellowship hall and library, and the parsonage.

Reflection: After reviewing the church's finances and assets described above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's mission and ministry?

For example, when was the time the church made a major budget change? How is the budgeting process done? What new ministry initiative has your church financed?

Sycamore has been faithful in tending to the gifts from former members. We invested them in Fidelity Funds and they have grown significantly. We have been reluctant to spend it, but we are at a point in the life of Sycamore where we realize we must invest those funds into our church to grow.

3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years.

One of the critical events of the last 6 years was the sudden recognition that the parsonage was in very poor shape, although it had been the continuous home for each of our Japanese pastors, none of whom had complained. The church leadership had therefore assumed all was well. However, when the first Japanese minister to have children was called, and we knew there would be 2 adults and 3 children in the house, we suddenly looked at it more critically. At that point, we realized that it was in bad shape. The Nichigo had a bequest of \$150,000 they were considering for a new building for the main church. However, we decided to use over half of that to do a major remodel of the parsonage. We asked for donations of materials and money, and as a result made a major upgrade to the property, making it much more livable. This remodeling and cleanup became a church-wide project that created a big sense of ownership for the whole church community.

The parsonage project also set the stage for looking at some of the long term needs of the church property. We made a prioritized list of projects needing to be done and have accomplished some of the major ones, namely a new roof and new floors for the downstairs and upstairs both. One of the big changes upstairs was removing the pews in the sanctuary, which were hand built and part of the original church. The idea was to allow for more uses of the sanctuary space, in addition to more creative arrangements for worship services. The project included new paint and cleaned curtains so the whole church looks much better and we are starting to see the many uses of the sanctuary now. As a church community, we tend to rally around these kinds of projects, and there is a real sense of accomplishment and pride when they are finished.

Some of the most significant events have been the transitions in leadership, both lay and ministerial. Each new English language pastor had their own somewhat rocky path. There was a successful transition from the founding preschool director to a new director after 20 years. We have transitioned moderators, both Japanese and English, fairly well. One of the consequences of the small membership is that we do not change council positions often, which makes it harder to convince other people to serve. Up until now, every five years the Japanese section would get a new minister. This continuous change and disruption has led to the desire for one bilingual pastor.

Describe a specific change your church has managed in the recent past.

Sycamore Church has navigated the pandemic very well. Worship leaders have learned new technologies. The worship team meets weekly to refine our Zoom worship which allowed/ provided for an experience of connection.

Sycamore has stepped out in faith and out of fear deciding on a new direction for the church. It is a major breakthrough for us to decide to use a portion of the Fidelity Funds. We have always considered the Funds to be untouchable, and now we are considering them to be an investment in the future. This is a huge decision for us.

Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. “Where two or three are gathered, there will be disagreement....” Describe your congregation’s values and practices when it comes to conflict.

For example, what is an example of a recent conflict and something your congregation learned from it? Describe an occasion when your church experienced conflict without being able to resolve it well. Does your church have policies, protocols or structures for dealing with conflict?)

Japanese culture plays a big part in how we handle conflict. Not discussing it. Avoiding it and keeping our heads down and staying busy. On the other hand, there is a willingness to criticize and nitpick, which is pretty pervasive and is very destructive over time. We recognize the need to work on this and have agreed upon a new Communication Covenant. Currently, there is some conflict within the Japanese speaking section. They have experienced several changes and losses which have affected them greatly. Ask us about it.

Ministerial History *(include all previous ministerial staff for the past 30 years)*

English Language		Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Rev. Dr. Celestine Fields	Interim Minister	2019-2021	Y

Rev. Kevin Omi	Senior Minister	2011-2018	Y
Rev. Sharon MacArthur		2001-2013	(Deceased)
Rev. Ellen Tanouye		1995-1999	N
Rev. Daniel Choy		1990-1999	(Deceased)
Rev. Ben Wu		1981-1988	N

Japanese Language	Title	Years of service	UCC Standing (Y/N)
Rev. Motomu Ishida		2 plus years	N
Rev. Yasutaka Yoshioka		5	N
Rev. Koji Sahara		5	N
Rev. Yoshiki Morita		5	N
Rev. Mitsuho Okado		5	N
Rev. Yoichi Watanabe		3	N
Rev. Keiichi Nakano		6	N
Rev. Nobuhiko Sugane		3	N

Comment on what your church has learned about itself and its relationship with persons who provided ministerial leadership:

We have learned that we need one bilingual pastor for the stability of the entire church. The Japanese language section has received a new pastor every five years, which brings a measure of instability to the Japanese language section. Sycamore desires a pastor to be with the people.

Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination?

Y – Ask us

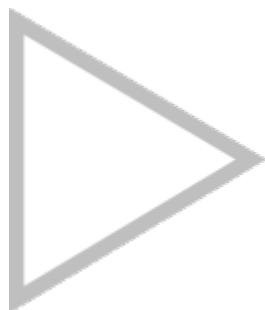
Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?

Y – Ask us

Has a past pastor been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church?

N (?)

Two former ministers did leave the church under controversy which we prefer that you ask us about.



4. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV) a.

COMMUNITY VISION

b. MISSION InSite

4a COMMUNITY VISION

How do the relationships and activities of your congregation extend outward in service and advocacy?

For example, which service activities has your church participated in this past year? Where has the church participated in global connections of care and justice? What is currently transformational in your church’s engagement with neighbors near or far?

Sycamore has supported the Bay Area Rescue Mission for many years financially, with food drives, school supplies, and a continuous food drive during the pandemic. We support J-Sei, PSR and PAAM nonprofit organizations financially.

Following the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in 2011, there was months-long fundraising and ongoing support that was spearheaded by the Nichigo members. Many of the members and leaders recognize that Sycamore is heavy on fundraising, and we are focused inward.

Describe your congregation’s participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association / conference / national setting).

The Lay Leadership have attended conferences, association meetings and installation services. We are an active member of Pacific Asian American Ministries of the United Church of Christ (PAAM). Sycamore's UCC ministers have all been active in their association, conference, and the national setting.

Many local churches love to tell the story of what they are doing in the community to transform lives. Some have identified certain aspects of their witness into the wider community using language shared with other UCC congregations. (Find more information as desired at ucc.org.) Check any statements below that apply to your UCC faith community.

Sycamore does not have a designation as a Global Mission Church.

However, every five years we bring a Japanese speaking minister from Japan.

- Accessible to All (A2A)
- Creation Justice
- Economic Justice
- Faithful and Welcoming
- God Is Still Speaking (GISS)
- Border and Immigrant Justice
- Inter-cultural/Multiracial (I'M)
- Just Peace
- Global Mission Church
- Open and Affirming (ONA)
- WISE Congregation for Mental Health
- Other UCC designations:
 - Designations from other denominations
 - None

Reflect on what the above statement(s) mean(s) to your community. Is your congregation interested in working toward any of the above statements of witness in the near future?

We have tried doing more of what we are already doing and it isn't working. While our preschool, bazaar and other activities are all very successful, they have not resulted in growing the congregation. Our thinking is that in order to attract new and younger members, we need to focus on justice and witness, which we have strong support for but no longer have the energy or numbers to take on by ourselves. That's why we need help. Our existing leadership is willing, but tired.

We are interested in a new direction of justice and witness ministry. A recent survey revealed our interest in the following UCC designations and ministries of justice:

1. Sanctuary Church
2. Creation Justice Church
3. Open and Affirming
4. A2A
5. Racial Justice - anti-Asian Hate
6. Children and Youth Justice

Describe your congregation's participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities (with other denominations and religious groups, local and regional).

Sycamore is a founding member of PAAM. The Japanese language minister has an ecumenical relationship with the Japanese American churches in the San Francisco-Bay Area. The Japanese language pastor in the past provided Bible studies with a local Buddhist temple.

If your congregation has a mission statement, how does that mission statement compare to the actual time spent engaging in different activities?

Think of the range of activities from time spent gathering, to governance, to time spent going out.

PreCovid 19, the majority of our time was spent in worship, fellowship (eating together), music events, and our fundraising events, which are well attended by the community. Our time in governance averages four-six hours per month.

Reflect on the scope of work assigned to your pastor(s). How is their community ministry and their ministry in and on behalf of the wider church accounted for in the congregation's expectations on their time?

We get anxious when our pastor engages in too many activities of the wider church which can take away from their work at Sycamore.

4b. MISSION InSite

Comment on your congregation's MissionInsite report with data for your neighborhood(s) or area. What trends and opportunities are shown?

In 2016 we completed The New Beginnings Program, a Disciples of Christ program. In the MissionInsite report completed during this process, it showed three populations immediately surrounding Sycamore (this does not include El Cerrito Hills area) that present opportunities for Sycamore's growth; Thriving Boomers, Flourishing Families and Significant Singles.**

All three of these would be interested in Sycamore's Japanese heritage and culture from the entertainment to the food. We will lift up two, The Boomers, who have no children at home, are well-educated and often go to cultural activities, and enjoy quality food that is presented in art form. They enjoy foreign cuisines. They attend musical and dance performances, concerts, theater, and pay attention to bettering their community through civic and political action. Politically, they support recycling (environmental causes), and equal rights for all. They are established in their community.

The Flourishing Families are Asians who enjoy theater and dance performances. They are interested in other cultures and consider themselves part of the global village. They support environmental causes and have high rates of contributing to political and environmental groups. They enjoy going to cultural events and attending theatre, dance performances and classical concerts. They are interested in other cultures and international events, and are established in their community.

**Of the three, few are interested in faith or religion.

How do your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?

The interests of the population surrounding Sycamore, as mentioned above, matches with what we do as a church and community.

How are the demographics of the community currently shaping ministry, or not?

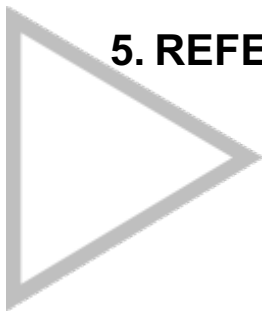
We are currently shaping “ministry” or events that speak to the demographic around the church, but we didn’t realize it was ministry and outreach. We would like our new pastor to use the MissionInsite data interpretation above to find ways to reach outward to 1,500 plus community members who visit Sycamore yearly. Including an advertising campaign of Sycamore’s new direction in justice and witness.

What do you hear when you talk to community leaders and ask them what your church is known for?

Sycamore is known for its yearly bazaar, rummage sale, and the people who are involved with the church.

What do new people in the church say when asked what got them involved?

People get involved with Sycamore because they love the people, enjoy Japanese culture, want to serve God, and most importantly they have been connected to Sycamore for years through their family attending the church or the preschool.



5. REFERENCE

Name up to three people who have agreed to serve as phone and written references. Advise the three references: “The contact information you provide may be shared publicly. Please use contact information that you feel comfortable giving to candidates so they can reach you with their questions.”

Make sure they are not members of your church but are persons who know your church well enough to be helpful to candidates seeking more information.

Request a letter from each reference in answer to the four prompts below.
Attach the letters (up to three) as desired.

REFERENCE 1

Rev. Dr. Melinda V. McLain
Pastor, The Good Table Inc.
Tel: 415-378-3193
melinda@miravistaucc.org/

Pastor of our sister church

REFERENCE 2

Rev. Nobu Hanaoka, retired nobuh@pacbell.net
415-425-3254
Friend of Sycamore and leader of Japanese ministers' unofficial group

REFERENCE 3

Rev. Dr. Randi Walker randi-walker-3891@att.net
505-717-2966
Former member of Sycamore. Retired UCC minister and Professor at Pacific School of Religion.

PROMPTS FOR REFERENCES

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry. Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry. Anything else you wish to share.



6. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- a. CLOSING PRAYER
- b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT
- c. CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION

6a. CLOSING PRAYER

My God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following Your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And we hope we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that, if we do this, You will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore we will trust You always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear, for You are ever with us, and You will never leave us to face our perils alone. Amen.

6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this profile that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates.

As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending suitable new minister for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates. We understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open

exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.

1. Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile? *(for example, church council or consistory, transition team, etc.)*

Sycamore's church council, search and call committee, and interim minister contributed to this profile.

2. Additional comments for interpreting the profile:

Signed:

Name / Title / Date:

6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

The congregation is currently in good standing with the association / conference named.

Staff Comment:

Sycamore Congregational Church is in good standing with the Bay Association/Northern California Nevada Conference.

To the best of my knowledge, ministerial history information is complete.

Staff Comment:

Yes, the ministerial history is accurate to my knowledge.

To the best of my knowledge, available church financial information is presented thoroughly.

Staff Comment:

Yes, to my knowledge the presented financials of Sycamore are
thoroughly
presented

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:

Davena L. Jones

Rev. Davena L Jones/Associate Conference Minister

davena@ncncucc.org

(510) 359-7208

October 14, 2021