

San Leandro Church of Christ: A Case Study of Renewal



Facilitators: Dr. Stan and Gena Granberg
HERITAGE 21 FOUNDATION

SUMMARY

The San Leandro Church of Christ is a church of amazing diversity located in one of the thriving, dynamic communities of San Leandro, CA. (Right next door to Oakland.) Through much of its almost eighty-year history, the San Leandro church has been a trend setter. From their ethnic diversity to their community engagement, the church has demonstrated its commitment to the love of Jesus for their community.

It was at the Pepperdine Bible Lectureship in 2017 that Woody (associate minister) and Judy Square contacted Dr. Stan Granberg about the dilemma the San Leandro church felt. The church was in a long term, dwindling spiral. The members loved their church, each other, and their community. Yet they could not seem to find a way that would allow them to move forward. The Squares were investigating the idea of getting help from the Granbergs to benefit from their years of experience coaching church plants with the Kairos organization.

In 2018 the church was ready, and Dr. Stan and Gena Granberg went to facilitate their assessment weekend, a Friday evening through Sunday afternoon event for their entire leadership team. The Granbergs decided to use the Heritage 21 assessment which is designed to determine the lifecycle stage of a church, the path the church is most suited to pursue (revision, renewal, redevelopment or repurpose), and to develop an appropriate plan for pursuing that path.

Assessment Observations

The assessment indicated that the church had only moderate capacity to attempt renewal or redevelopment. Any church has three options available to it at the later stages in the church lifecycle:

1. Do nothing and continue to decline without a strategy. The San Leandro church could continue to exist for more years without much change. However, such a choice means the mission of the church would be self-perpetuation without appreciable mission impact. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 24-30) suggests this would be akin to taking the one talent approach, resulting in rebuke.
2. Renew into a healthy church. While almost every declining church would choose the renewal option, only 5% of churches in the latter lifecycle stage are capable of successfully accomplishing renewal. San Leandro is a church that has navigated a number of crucial life decisions well (racial integration, gender roles, transgender engagement, and worship as experience) that gave us hope the church could renew for effective 21st century ministry and new growth.



3. Repurpose its resources by closing the church and selling its property. In this option Heritage 21 would provide a closing process that celebrates the life of the church while passing forward some of God's financial blessings for a new generation of 21st century churches. While this was not the option the church chose to pursue, it still needed to create a realistic estate plan in case the renewal process is not successful.

During the assessment weekend the church unanimously decided to pursue a renewal strategy. Supporting this decision were these facts: 1) there was still an active, engaged body of believers, 2) no evidence of internal strife, 3) a working leadership team, and 4) a good worship experience. The church neighborhood is also regenerating as younger families are moving into the area, replacing older, long-term residents. The church members reflect the demographics of their neighborhood. Because of these positives, the facilitating team concurred that the San Leandro church should pursue a renewal path with a reassessment at six months and at one year to determine whether renewal should continue.

The San Leandro leadership team received a written report which outlined all the findings and discussion of the assessment weekend. The Heritage 21 facilitating team also worked with the leaders of the renewal process to develop their first 6-month plan.

A Letter from Woody and Judy

Hi Stan and Gena,

We have been wanting to catch up with you for the last few months but just didn't have time to write all that we wanted to share.

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since we've started this journey towards being a missional church. You two have launched us on a course that many people have been longing for - for a long time. Ernie Hardman, a 101-year-old that I meet with every week, has been so encouraging to me and is elated that we are finally being and doing what we're called to be and do. Thank you for opening our eyes to what we can become. (And just in time too - because it's 2020 and this year is no better time to get a clear vision of what God has been calling us to.)



Woody & Judy Square 1

We've had 4 main events over the past 8 months that we've focused on and have used to help build momentum leading into the next event. It started with Easter and then was followed by the National Night Out Block Party, which was followed by Trunk or Treat/Haunted House and then we ended the year with a Christmas Pageant. We took your advice of using the momentum of one event to propel us into the next.

One very encouraging thing in all of these events was the involvement and collaboration we received from neighbors. You already know how our Easter service went - our average

attendance was about 50 and even though we should have set 75 as a goal for our Easter service, the elders wanted to set a goal of 100. We had 126!

We see God beginning to bring people our way as we become more intentional about outreach. It seems like people are more hopeful and that a new enthusiasm and energy are starting to take hold.

The elders have asked me to come up with a 5-year plan for our church and I'm in the process of doing that. (I'd welcome any and all suggestions you may have.)

Prayer is the main reason why things have gone as well as they have. Our prayer team meets twice a month to pray specifically for our Renewal efforts.

Thank you for everything! I hope you are able to attend Pepperdine this year because we'd love to get together with you and share a meal.

We love you dearly.

Your fellow laborers in Christ,

Woody and Judy

TAKE AWAYS FROM THE ASSESSMENT WEEKEND

When we completed the assessment weekend with the San Leandro church, here are the takeaways the participants listed:

- We still feel good about our church
- Strategy "Land" (Lab) is next step
- Passion and action ready
- We feel energized, overwhelmed, and hopeful
- We've done some things right
- Opened a positive framework that is doable
- Everyone has to invest
- This work will take sacrifice
- Overwhelmed, we can't be alone

It is too early to tell whether the San Leandro Church of Christ will end up in the rare 5% percentile of declining churches who are able to renew and grow again, but they are hopeful. The current pandemic has afforded them new opportunities to reach out to the community by hosting a racial justice demonstration, two Listening Summits, a parenting class, online Vacation Bible School, and a prayer vigil. Their zoom church services have better attendance than their in-person services before the pandemic. Their Redevelopment Team members are reading through the book *Canoeing the Mountains* and trying to apply its principles to forge ahead into new territory. Pray for them that they will be open, attentive and obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading.