

NOE VALLEY MINISTRY

MISSION STUDY 2024



*“Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

-- Isaiah 43:19

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission Statement	page 2
Who Envision Becoming	page 2
Desired Skills for a Pastor or Pastoral Team	page 2
Who We are Now	page 3
Congregational Demographics	page 5
Recent Congregational Programs	page 6
Noe Valley Neighborhood	page 8
Who We have Been, Historical Summary	page 9

APPENDIX

Current Budget	page 13
Financial Analysis	page 15
Neighborhood Demographics	page 17
Congregational Conversations	page 20
A History of Presbyterians in Noe Valley	page 22

MISSION STATEMENT

Noe Valley Ministry is a faithful community seeking to follow Christ in our personal lives and in a changing community and culture.

WHO WE ENVISION BECOMING

Unlike many small, aging congregations in this time of church decline, Noe Valley Ministry stands on a fiscally sound foundation. Having survived death and rebirth as a congregation more than once, its longtime members are adept at adapting creatively to social change. The Ministry thinks of itself as “The Little Church that Could,” poised to engage the future.

The congregation seeks a pastor or pastoral team comfortable with change and innovation who can work with and lead the congregation into new ways of being church in our neighborhood and city. A new name? New ministries and partnerships? New worship styles built on our Reformed Heritage? —these are a few among many possibilities. We seek a visionary pastor or staff team excited to engage these challenges.

DESIRED SKILLS FOR A PASTOR OR PASTORAL TEAM

Worship:

- Welcoming, creative liturgical leadership including music, the arts, a diversity of cultural and spiritual traditions
- Challenging relevant, Biblically-grounded reflections to inform faith and inspire spiritual renewal and action—with time to reflect and share together our diverse faith journeys in a changing world
- Collaborative worship planning, including possible Sunday alternatives such as: in-person/hybrid, virtual only, Sunday fellowship meals, community service, labyrinth, Music for the Soul, Town Square Sundays/Saturdays, etc.



Pastoral Care and Christian Nurture:

- Creates opportunities for community building and authentic faith-sharing fellowship during and after worship, potluck meals, study groups, workshops, etc.
- In coordination with Care committee, provides compassionate, culturally and ethnically sensitive pastoral care responsive to a diversity of faith journeys

Organizational Skills and Leadership Development:

- Develops leadership informed in Christian faith and organized to implement its vision
- Visionary who works with and leads the congregation into new ways of being church that speak to our changing context
- Open to exploring creative ministry options: full-time/part-time/bivocational; co-pastors (one for worship/pastoral care and one for new ministries/partnerships), seminary grad/intern with mentor, etc.

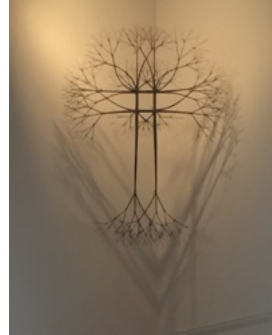
Relationships with Community and Building Participants:

- Community organizing skills to engage the congregation with the neighborhood and invite the Noe Valley community to use its resources to meet the needs of the city
- Promotes building as a sacred place of hospitality, healing, creative arts and music for the neighborhood and for San Franciscans seeking spiritual community
- Represents the congregation and encourages its presence at neighborhood and city organizations, such as Interfaith Council, Saturday Farmer's Market, Regional Anti-racism, Presbytery, NV Merchants, Town Halls and community forums

WHO WE ARE NOW

The Noe Valley Ministry congregation worships in a recently renovated 1888 Victorian Gothic building. The sanctuary opens onto a labyrinth hall crowned by a soaring stained-glass window that incorporates two symbols important to the congregation—the in-laid labyrinth and the Ruth Asawa cross. The artist

beautifully captures Noe Valley Ministry's creative energy and its core values of connection, inspiration and healing.



In previous mission studies, NVM described itself as “quirky” and “a diverse motley ship of fools.” The congregation sees itself as an inclusive, spiritually-accepting, progressive congregation in the Reformed tradition. Enriched by music, the arts, and liturgy from a variety of traditions, worship is valued as “the work of the people.”

NVM offers welcoming hospitality where people from a diversity of beliefs and religious backgrounds can find nurture for their spiritual journeys. Formerly un-churched or having left the institutional church as youth, many find a spiritual home at Noe Valley Ministry. Members and friends are more likely to characterize themselves as “seekers” rather than “believers,” and “spiritual” rather than “religious.”

Though, in the past, characterized as activist, the congregation is now more worship-centered than community-oriented. Members, however, are strongly committed to acting out their faith in their daily lives.

In keeping with the national trend for Presbyterian churches, today Noe Valley Ministry is smaller and aging. Its membership is largely white, single and married adults; some attend without their partners, some are LGBT. With a mix of retired folks on fixed income and professionals, the congregation's membership is more economically diverse than the Noe Valley neighborhood. Like the neighborhood, it is racially and culturally less diverse than the city as a whole.

Currently, the congregation consists of sixteen active members and fifteen active friends/financial supporters. All but one member has been active in the work of

the church for more than fifteen years. In fact, six of the sixteen have been active for more than twenty-five years.

In the Session's recent nine-month search for an interim pastor, NVM became aware of the dearth of pastors nationally as well as the impact of Bay Area housing prices. Unlike many declining congregations across the U.S., due to building rentals and recent renovations, the congregation is unique in its strong financial position which allows options when considering the future.

- One possibility under consideration is partnering with another congregation. Some conversations have already begun along with shared worship services and other events.
- Other possibilities under consideration are offering alternative options on different Sundays of the month, such as: in-person/hybrid, virtual only, fellowship meals, evening worship, labyrinth, Music for the Soul, Town Square Sundays/Saturdays, etc.
- Yet another possibility is to explore creative staffing options, such as: full-time/part-time/bi-vocational; co-pastors, one for worship/pastoral care and one for new ministries, seminary grad/intern with mentor, new ministries and partnerships, etc.



CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

As the congregation enters 2024, Noe Valley Ministry now has sixteen active members (one of whom is virtual), and fifteen active friends/financial supporters. Active non-members are embraced as full participants.

Age Range:

- Six of the current members have been active for twenty-five years or more and an additional nine have been active for more than fifteen years:
- Five are 71 + years of age
- Seven fall into the 56-70 age range

- Four are between 41 and 55 years of age

Neighborhood:

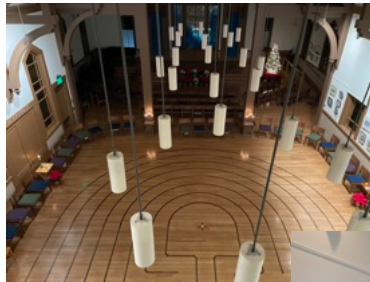
- Eight active members live in Noe Valley
- Three live in the nearby neighborhoods of Bernal Heights or Glen Park
- Two live elsewhere in the city
- Three members live outside the city with one participating virtually

Racial Ethnic:

- In terms of racial-ethnic breakdown, NVM has one Mid-Eastern member, one Hispanic-Jewish, one Asian, and thirteen Caucasians.

Committee/Small Group membership:

- 4 Session
- 5 Care Committee
- 6 Choir
- 7 Worship
- 5 Building
- 3 Finance
- 6 Racial Justice
- 1 Personnel
- 1 Labyrinth
- 1 Communion
- 5 Book Club
- 7 Covenant Group



RECENT CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Advent Bible Study

Several sessions after Worship in 2021 by Pastor David Brown
 One session each in 2023 lead by Pastor Mason-Browne, and Jeanne Choy Tate

Community Dinners in Member's Homes

To discuss the upcoming pastor's retirement, how each come to attend NVM and what each likes and also would like to change our church. Six dinners during the months of June and July 2022

Congregational Conversations

After Worship on January 29 and April 23, 2023 to further refine member's needs and interests as we emerge from COVID, to prepare for our Mission Study and transition to a new pastor.

Neighborhood Forum

Inviting the entire neighborhood to hear updates and dialogue about homelessness and other concerns with the San Francisco City Attorney and our San Francisco Supervisor.

Charlie Brown Christmas



Inviting the congregation and neighborhood families with children to a fun musical event and story. Offered in December 2020 and 2023 with a live jazz band.

Community Dance

Conducted after worship in September 2023 with instruction from a dance teacher – simple line dancing for all ages.



Friends and Family Worship

Special worship in October 2023 with members encouraged to invite family members to attend.

Dinners or lunches with other churches



Inviting St. James and Mission Bay PCUSA to join us for worship with lunch or for dinner at their church or ours. Three events in 2023.

Feeding the Brothers

Preparing food and serving dinners in homeless shelters for two or three nights every year.



Homeless Lunches

Preparing and delivering bag lunches to homeless people in San Francisco in 2018-2020, then post-COVID in 2022 and again recently with Bethany Methodist church in November 2023.



Grace and Restoration Project of the West Bay Region

Learning how to be Anti-Racist, how to do anti-racism education with the congregation, and how to work in partnership with other congregations. Included providing volunteer support for weekly posts, finances and leadership team.

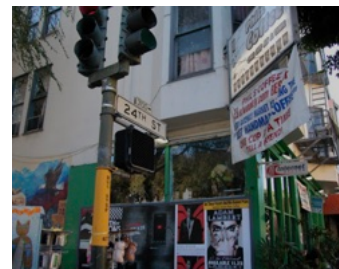
NOE VALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD

Roughly one-mile square, the Noe Valley neighborhood stands at the center of San Francisco with 24th Street running through the district as its main shopping area. To the Northeast lies the city's downtown area. To the East is the Mission District, historically a largely Latino neighborhood while, to the North, the Castro is largely gay. To the South lie Glen Park and Bernal Heights, neighborhoods similar in make-up to Noe Valley. To the West, sheltering the neighborhood from ocean winds and fog, lie the upscale neighborhoods of Twin Peaks and Diamond Heights.



A walk the length of 24th Street, the major shopping street in Noe Valley reveals the full diversity of the city. From a high-income area to the west with gourmet restaurants and unique boutiques, moving east, a person crosses Guerrero Street to enter the Mission community of low-income Hispanic stores and restaurants. Served by Mission Iglesia

Presbyteriana, this neighborhood has been a heavily Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, moderate income mix of service workers, laborers and some professionals. Even the Hispanic end of 24th Street is rapidly changing however as new cafes and restaurants spring up to serve yet another wave of gentrification.



Located in the Noe Valley neighborhood at the Western end of 24th Street, Noe Valley Ministry is situated in one of the fastest changing, upwardly mobile neighborhoods of San Francisco. Google buses and traffic congestion, “parklets” and parking permits, boutiques and chain stores, techies and nannies with strollers, proliferated in the last two decades. Today Noe Valley is mostly residential, with a mix of owners and renters. Families with children, singles and couples without children—with a relatively high percentage of LGBT residents—make for a diverse neighborhood.

Noe Valley Ministry is the only PC(USA) church in the southeast quadrant of the city. It is the closest church for the neighborhoods of Bernal Heights, Glen Park, Diamond Heights, Sutro Heights, the Valencia corridor, and possibly even SoMa and Portrero Hill. Though members long to attract families and young adults, in a city of ‘NONES,’ the lures of Sunday events make that attraction difficult.

Much like their hippie predecessors, the current upscale community of techies, gay professionals and double income families with nannies tends to be spiritual but disillusioned with, even hostile, to the established church. Thus, members walk a fine line between overtly claiming the congregation’s Christian identity and values and the risk of offending residents with negative feelings about the institutional Church.

WHO WE HAVE BEEN, A HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The history of Noe Valley Presbyterian Church began in 1881 as a sparsely settled neighborhood of Irish working-class families on scattered farms and boarding



houses. In 1888, the congregation—re-named Lebanon Presbyterian—moved up the hill on Sanchez Street to its current site where it laid the cornerstone for a one-story church building. This sanctuary—now raised to add a lower floor for offices, a school and meeting rooms—is still occupied by the congregation today.

By the 1960s, the original working-class families had either died or retired to the suburbs. Attracted by the low rents, a younger countercultural generation of artists, activists and

spiritual seekers moved in. This generation had little interest in traditional religion and in 1977—after 96 years serving the Noe Valley community—Lebanon Presbyterian formally closed its doors.

The Rev. Carl Smith soon began to lay ground for a new church development capable of ministering to the changing community. Incorporated in 1984 as Noe Valley Ministry, the new congregation emphasized Eastern meditation, social justice and inclusive language. In San Francisco Presbytery, the congregation stood out as countercultural. Politically active, members participated in protests and the gay parade. After a 19-year ministry, Rev. Smith retired in 1996. Five of the congregation’s current active members and 2 of its active supporters joined the ministry during this period.

In 1998, Rev. Keenan Kelsey began a 14-year pastorate. Members took liturgy seriously as the “work of the people.” The congregation reconnected with its Reformed Presbyterian heritage, emphasizing a strong music program, the liturgical year, monthly Labyrinth walks, and spiritual disciplines. One of the early More Light churches, LGBTQ advocacy was taken seriously particularly in seeking the ordination of one of its members. The congregation maintained its artistic/activist identity and the ministry’s reputation as a place for performance and community events expanded city-wide. Building users, however, were seldom aware of the community of faith at the center of the ministry.

Like the working-class generation preceding it, when Noe Valley neighborhood entered the 21st century, the hippie-activist generation was ageing-out of the movement and moving away. The neighborhood began experiencing waves of gentrification. “Nones” moved in and, by 2002, the congregation had less than 50 members.

Undaunted, the Ministry began plans for a 4.1 million renovation of its historic 1888 building. Initially, it was hoped the renovated building would serve as a Tri-Faith sacred space where Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith communities could worship together. Though this innovative plan did not work out, renovation plans continued and a donated parking lot on 24th Street was sold to acquire



funds. The lot became a Noe Valley Town Square, now a vibrant center of the community.



In March 2011, with renovations pending, the congregation moved out of the building and into nearby St Luke's hospital chapel for worship. Three years later, in 2014, the congregation returned to a beautifully renovated sacred space with an anchor Spanish immersion preschool tenant and other rentals to support

the ministry financially.

Rev. David Brown was then hired as interim pastor and later called as pastor. The congregation was the first in San Francisco Presbytery to become a Matthew 25 congregation with a focus on ending structural racism. Members were involved in creating the West Bay Regional Anti-Racism project and the congregation participated in the Region's Grace and Restoration project.

When the COVID pandemic occurred, the congregation transitioned successfully to online worship. With the end of the pandemic, fewer members returned to in-person worship. Though Rev. Brown retired in September 2022, the congregation was unable to find an interim until May 2023 when the Rev. Carmen Mason-Brown was called as transitional pastor.

APPENDIX

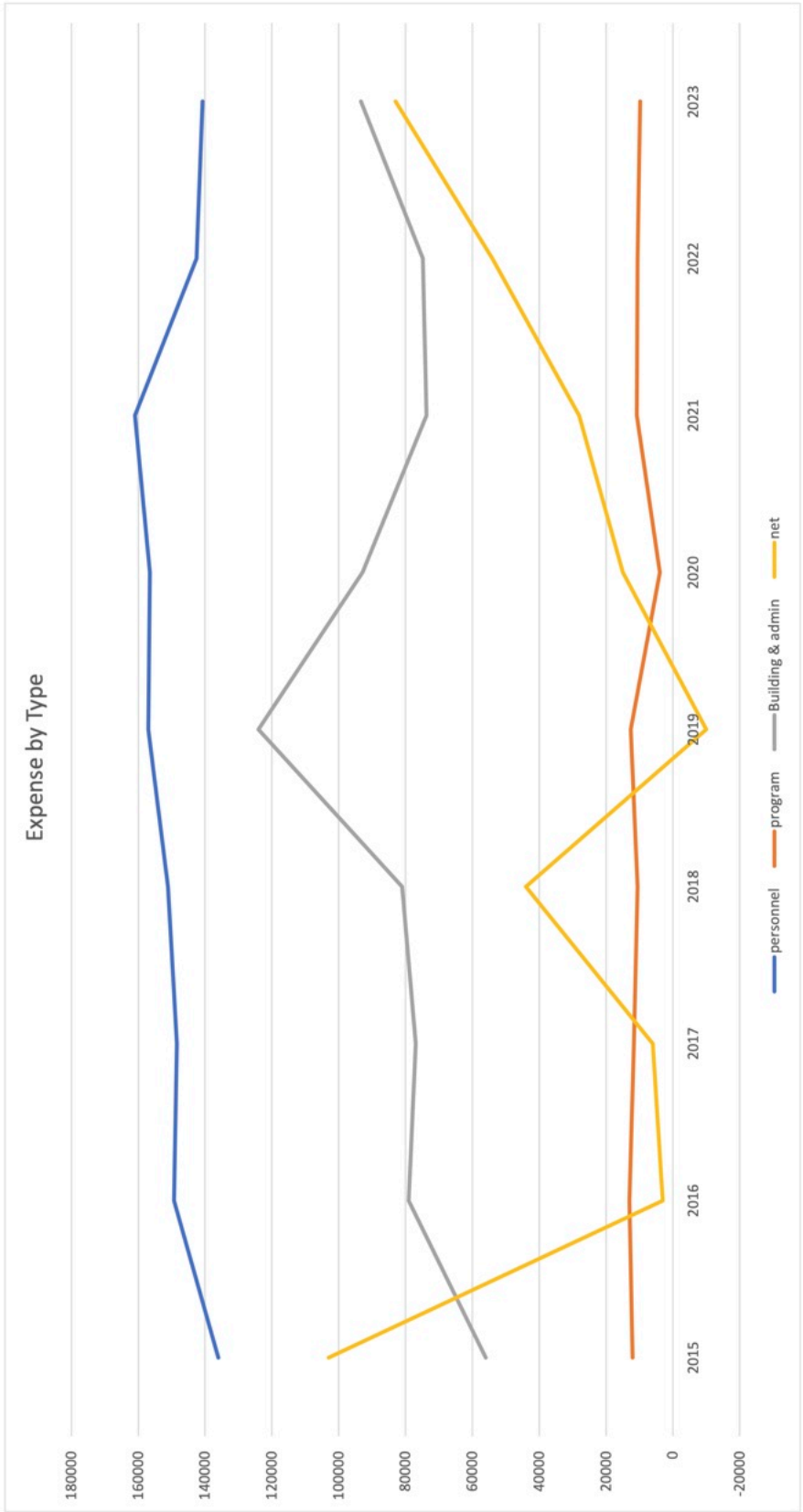
January 23, 2024

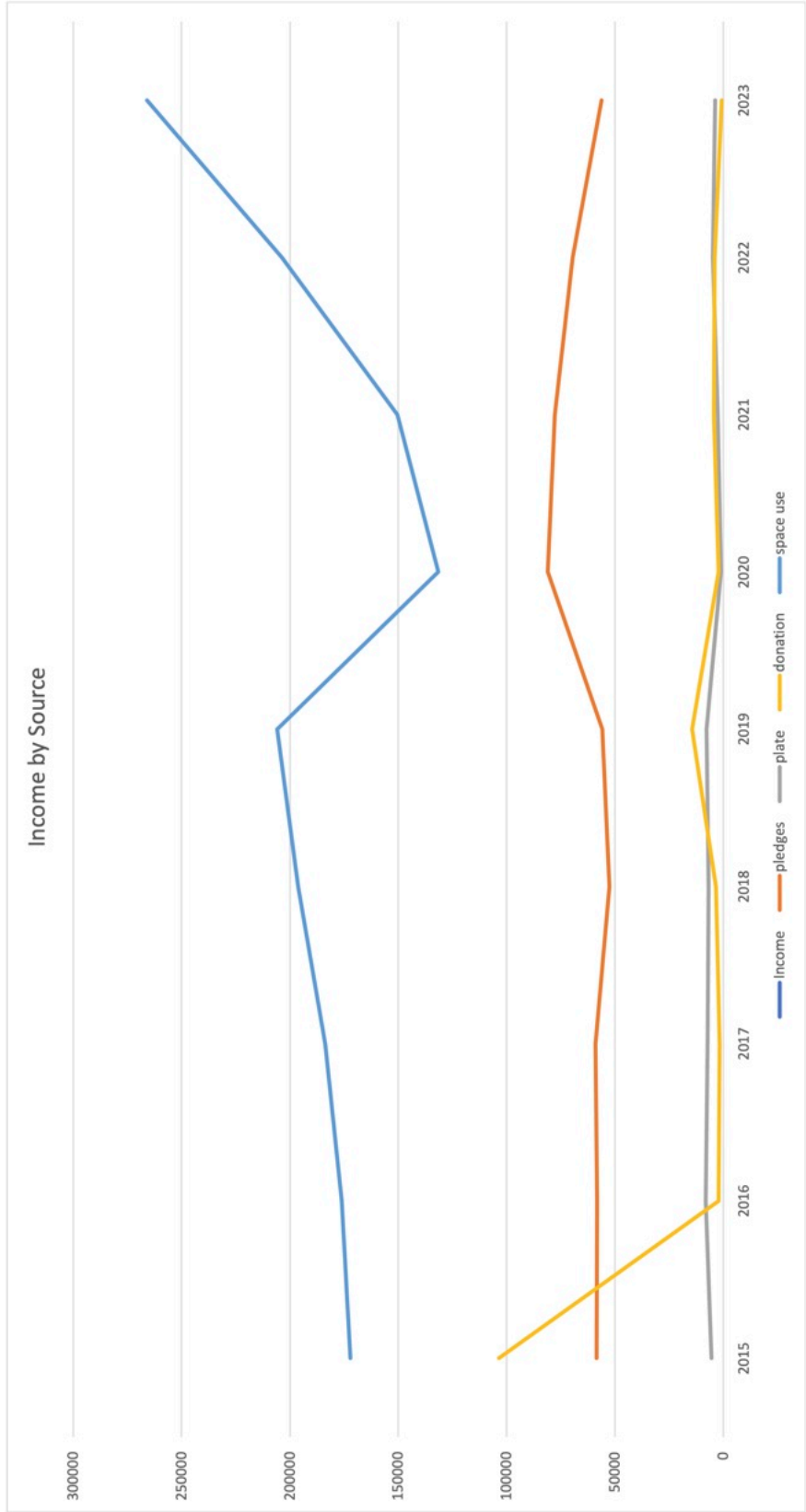
Noe Valley Ministry Budget Report

	<u>2023 Budget</u>	<u>2023 Actual</u>	<u>2024 Budget</u>
Income			
400 Income			
410 Church Offering Pledges	70,000	60,104	62,000
415 Church Offering Plate	4,000	3,850	4,000
420 Unrestricted Donation	2,000	625	2,000
450 Space Use	250,000	260,049	270,000
Total 400 Income	326,000	324,627	338,000
Expenses			
500 Personnel Expenses			
510 Pastor - Salary & Housing	77,250	45,706	77,250
512 Pastor - Pension	30,900	4,153	6,616
513 Pastor- Study Leave	1,000	47	1,000
514 Pastor- Expenses	2,000	169	2,000
516 Pastor - Auto/Travel	1,500	-	1,500
517 Pulpit Supply	1,800	4,200	1,800
530 Admin Dir	35,000	44,655	48,000
535 Bookkeeper	5,700	5,700	5,700
545 Music Director	15,000	15,350	15,350
550 Custodian	9,152	11,719	12,000
550 Livestreaming	2,171	2,930	3,000
560 Payroll Taxes	4,961	6,180	6,763
570 Workers Comp Insurance	962	1,501	1,400
575 Bonus			4,350
580 Payroll Service	850	905	905
Total 500 Personnel Expenses	188,246	143,214	187,633
600 Program Expenses			
610 Worship	700	786	3,100
611 Worship Music	2,500	2,814	2,500
614 Care Team		316	1,000
615 Education			
616 Community Outreach		618	3,500
619 Food - Sunday/Meetings		301	500
Community Music Events			1,500
625 PCUSA Assessment	1,560	1,560	1,080
630 Mission	5,000	580	5,000
635 Session Expense		123	150
637 Coffee Hour	300	316	300
650 Membership	50	47	50
655 Dues	-	200	-
660 Retreats		84	
666 E-giving Fees	1,300	822	1,000
670 Gallery Sanchez	-	58	-
Total 600 Program Expenses	11,410	8,624	19,680
700 Office/Gen'l Admin Expenses			
710 Office	1,500	1,351	1,500
715 Telephone / Internet	5,200	5,119	5,200
720 Postage	113	203	200
725 Publicity	1,000	1,448	1,000
735 Computer	1,000	313	1,000
740 Building Operations	20,000	23,759	25,000
741 Building Monitoring Svcs	3,000	2,380	3,000
742 Elevator Maintenance Contract	7,571	9,411	10,500
743 Extraordinary Bldg Expenses	10,000	-	10,000
761 Property Taxes	1,000	1,008	1,008
745 Utilities	23,100	23,539	27,000
750 Insurance	13,919	15,679	17,974
760 Loan Interest	6,000	5,901	6,000
Loan Principal	3,907	4,006	3,907
Total 700 Office/Gen'l Admin Expenses	97,310	94,117	113,289
Total Expenses	296,966	245,956	320,603
Net Income (Expense)	29,034	78,671	17,397

NVM Account Balances as of 12/31/23

Umpqua Checking Account	52,043.49
Sterling Checking Account	148,830.59
Building Fund Checking Account	3,992.67
Schwab Brokerage Account	56,670.08
Total Asset Accounts	<u>261,536.83</u>
Synod Amortized Loan	101,910.67
Federal Tax Liability	804.46
CA Tax Liability	66.89
Space Use Deposits	10,912.00
Deacons' Fund	644.72
Designated Funds	1,032.61
JBird Fund	8,100.00
Transitional Fund	3,000.00
West Region Antiracism Project	5,152.10
Total Liabilities	<u>131,623.45</u>
Net Assets	<u><u>129,913.38</u></u>





NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOGRAPHICS

The data from two different sources differ. 94114 zip code data dips into the Castro neighborhood and skews towards single, white males. Data for a one-mile radius dips into the Mission district and skew towards younger Spanish-speaking families.

Population: Age, Gender, Race

94114: Between 2018-2022, the 94114 zip code had a total population of 33,858. Population growth has stabilized. 13,606 or 40.2% were female and 20,252 or 59.8% were male.

The median age was 37.9 years. An estimated 11.3% of the population was under 18 years, 43% was 18-44 years, 31% was 45 to 64 years, and 14.5% was 65 years or older. 13.9% of all households had one or more people under the age of 18 while 22.6% of all households had one or more people 65 years and over.

70.2% White; 13.5% Asian; 9.7% Hispanic or Latino; 2.4% Black or African American; 0.6% American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 2% Some Other Race.

10.2% reported Two or More Races. 80.2% were U.S. natives with 36.5% born in California. 19.8% were foreign-born with 60.9% being naturalized U.S. citizens. 40.9% came from Asia, 13% from Latin America, and 3.4% from Africa.

One-mile radius: 13% are boomers (60+ yrs), 38% Gen X (44-59 yrs), 20% Millennials (28-43 yrs), and 25% Gen Z (12-27 yrs). Age group for 17 and under declined along with the 35-54 age group. At the same time, people between ages 18-24 and 55 and above increased.

Race: White 55%, Latino 24%, Asian 13%, Black 2% and Other 6%.

Households and Families

94114: In 2018-2022, there were 16,946 households in Noe Valley's 94114 zip code, Census Tract 211. The average household size was 1.99%.

Among persons 15 and older, 35.1% of males and 45.5% of females were currently married. Those who never married were 56% of males and 42% of females. Married, but separated included 35% of males and 45% of females.

Married-couple households made up 32.4% percent of the households while cohabiting couple households made up 12.5% of households. Female householders with no spouse or partner present were 20.2 percent of all households, while 34.9 percent of households had male householders with no spouse or partner present. Of households with one person, 26% were men living alone and 13.9% were women, for a total of 40% of all households.

Of the occupied housing units, the percentage of houses occupied by owners was 46.4% while renters occupied 53.6%. The average household size of owner-occupied houses was 2.26 and, in renter-occupied houses, it was 1.74.

In 2018-2022, the median property value for owner-occupied houses was more than \$2,000,000. The median monthly housing costs for owners with a mortgage was \$4,001. For renter-occupied houses, the median gross rent was \$3,079.

One-mile radius: Average household size decreased from 2.96 to 2.12. 19% of households with children are single parent households while 53% of residents over 15 never married. 152 grandparents live with grandchildren under 18 years old with 15.8% responsible for the basic needs of their grandchildren.

Income

94114: The median income of households in Noe Valley was \$184,671. An estimated 2.9% of households had an income below \$10,000 a year and 47.5% had income of \$200,000 or more.

74% of the Noe Valley of the population 16 and over were employed while 22% were not currently in the labor force. 77.8% (17,661 people) are in management, business, sciences or the arts while 10.9% (2,486 people) work in sales and office occupations.

An estimated 20.8% of households received Social Security and an estimated 17.5% of households received retirement income other than Social Security. The average income from Social Security was \$24,238.

In 2018-2022, 5.4% were in poverty. An estimated 2.7% of children under 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 6.2% of people 65 years old and over and an estimated 5.7% of people 18 to 64 years who were below the poverty level.

One-mile radius: 86% of residents hold white collar jobs while 14% hold blue collar jobs. 30% are in executive/managerial positions and 42% are in professional/specialty positions.

76% of households earn above \$100k while the median cost of a single-family home is \$2.6 Million. Racially, median income for White households is \$197k, for Asians \$161k, for other \$134k, for Latino \$99k, and for Black \$88k. In 2028, the projected median income is expected to be \$200k and the average is expected to be \$318k.

Education

94114: In 2018-2022, 97.6% of people 25 years and over had at least graduated from high school while 79% had a bachelor's degree or higher. An estimated 2.3% did not complete high school. Total school enrollment was 4,222 in 2018-2022. Nursery school enrollment was 387 and kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment was 2,591. College or graduate school enrollment was 1,244.

One-mile radius: 38% are college graduates, 33% hold graduate or professional degrees. 86% of residents hold white collar jobs while 14% hold blue collar jobs. In the next five years, elementary age children are expected to decline, middle school children will remain about the same and the number of highschoolers will go up.

CONGREGATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Summary 10-25-2023 of three congregational meetings: Refreshing our Worship in Jan; Serving our Neighborhood in March, and Congregational Survey results in July.

Where are we today (Oct) We are more than a year into our Mission Study. Success requires:

- Congregational agreement on focus for worship and church activities over next 5 years (update mission study)
- Realistic expectations for what we want new pastor to accomplish.

Refreshing our Worship (Jan Mtg)

- **Strengthen sense of community:** move pastor and liturgist to the floor, chairs in a circle
- **Welcome newcomers:** engage visitors during and after service; to make them feel seen and appreciated
- **More contemporary music:** mix traditional and more popular arrangements & instruments

Serving our Neighborhood (March Mtg)

- **Get our own house in order:** build and model a worship community that is intimate and personal, a safe space where people feel able to be honest and open to sharing
- **Build connection with our neighborhood:** Form more connections with building sharers like Hola Kids. Seek volunteers from the community to help meet needs.
- **Take visible action in our community:** monthly senior meals, homeless meals, show up in town square to get volunteers for our service events

Survey results (July Mtg)

- **Value of NVM:** supportive fellowship, uplifting music, inspiring sermons
- **Who comes to NVM:** lapsed Presbyterians/Protestants, Catholics, single spouses
- **Hope for future of NVM:** more families, balance community and worship activities

NVM Community Dinners Summer 2022

Important Strengths to Maintain:

- Welcoming hospitality
- Inclusive community: a motley, quirky crew
- Emphasis on music and the arts, including liturgical arts
- History of activism and social justice
- Authentic, unpretentious relationships
- Meditative, sacred space

Challenges Facing Churches Today:

- Individualized/self-isolating culture: cell phones, media, remote work, 'me' generation
- Post-COVID takes more planning to get together, to create community
- Many Sunday alternative activities in city
- Hybrid alternatives; younger generation does not expect to attend every Sunday
- Families with children have Sunday activities and need Sunday for family time; no critical mass
- Pastors' values changing; pastoral calls no longer priority; salaries not sustainable, limited housing options

Possible Changes/What we need more of:

Worship Changes

- Less formal, more personal worship (not a performance), more silence/meditation
- Engaging, less academic sermons connecting Bible and faith to personal lives and current events
- Less polarizing politics and more spiritual nurture; hope for dark times
- Continued emphasis on music and arts (including liturgical arts)
- Use members more in worship and planning: Prayers by the people
- Inclusion of diverse faith and music traditions

More opportunities to build authentic relationships/community, have fun and fellowship

- Follow-up community dinners
- More opportunities to include the hybrid community of those away

- Pastor strong on engaging community
- Revive activism and commitment to social justice; do community service together
- Younger pastor to help us find a unique niche
- Inclusion of non-traditional genders

Ways to Engage our neighbor community with radical hospitality

- Explore alternative worship times
- Offer family and children's program
- Community nights: family, game, movie, cabaret, singalong, drag, lectures
- Booth or flyers at Saturday market
- Seasonal events: caroling in park, safe Halloween,
- Bistro bible study
- Safety and community resource events

A HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANS IN NOE VALLEY (updated 2023)

Lebanon Presbyterian Church, 1800's-1912:

In 1776, with native Ohlone and Costanoan populations now decimated, the parcel of land that would later become Noe Valley provided agricultural support for the nearby Mission Dolores. In 1845, that land became part of the 4,443-acre Rancho San Miguel owned by Jose de Jesus Noe, the last Mexican alcalde (mayor) of Yerba Buena (soon to be named San Francisco).

After the 1849 Gold Rush, John Horner, a Mormon immigrant, purchased Rancho San Miguel for \$200,000. Horner subdivided the land into blocks and lots that became known as Horner's Addition. The area, however, remained only sparsely settled with a few homes and boarding houses, a sprinkling of vegetable and dairy farms, and light industry. The neighborhood was primarily settled by working-class Irish families who came to escape the potato famine in their home country.

By 1880, grocery stores, bars, stables, doctors' offices, churches and fire stations had been added to the neighborhood. There were now enough residents for the Pacific Presbyterian Union to open a Sabbath School for 25 children in Edwards Hall at Sanchez and Jersey Streets (named after Horner's home state). Twenty

months later, on November 20, 1881, this fledgling Sunday School became Noe Valley Presbyterian Church or, as it is listed in the 1884 phone directory, Noe Valley and Bernal Heights Mission.

In June 1884, due to cedar timbers in the roof of Edwards Hall, the church was re-named Lebanon Presbyterian Church, in reference to the Biblical “cedars of Lebanon.” Then, in 1888, Lebanon Presbyterian purchased a lot for \$800 that lay further up the hill at Sanchez and Elizabeth Street (named after Horner’s wife) and lay the cornerstone for a new building there.

Though the Market Street Rail was extended to Noe Valley in 1892, the neighborhood did not grow until after the 1906 earthquake. The church was one of the few wood frame churches to survive the earthquake though there was enough damage that, for one month, services were held in a vacant lot across the street. Led by Rev. Logan, the text of his sermon was based on 1Kings 19:12: “After the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fires; and after the fire a still small voice.” With downtown homes and businesses devastated by the earthquake and fire, Irish and Italian families fled to the less damaged Noe Valley for refuge.

The congregation’s ‘Lemajos Players’ with their dramatic presentations were an important addition to the community though the church building was too small to accommodate all its performances. In 1912, the Rev. Dickerson was called as pastor for \$100 a month and in 1926, the church building was lifted up one story and a new ground floor was added. Shortly afterward, the 1929 Stock Market Crash hit the congregation of 160 members hard, and both the church and its members were left in a state of financial distress.

Hippie/Activist Era, 1960 –1996:

The 1960's brought significant cultural changes and social upheaval to the whole nation with San Francisco at the epicenter. Noe Valley’s original working-class families—many of whom had lived in Noe Valley for several generations—began passing on or retiring to the suburbs. Attracted by the low rents of a working-class neighborhood, a younger counter-cultural generation moved in.

As Noe Valley became an inner-city community, Lebanon church joined with Howard Presbyterian, Steward Memorial and Trinity in 1958 to form the InnerCity

Council, housed at Lebanon. Additional rooms for offices were added to the church building. Then, in 1970, in response to community needs a cooperative nursery school was established which met in the building.

Among Noe Valley's artists, activists and spiritual seekers, there was little interest in traditional religion. Attendance at Lebanon Presbyterian dwindled. Soon, except for the nursery school, the church building no longer remained open. In 1977, after 96 years in the community, there were eight remaining members. Lebanon Presbyterian Church formally closed its doors. Today (2023), Noe Valley Ministry member, Carol de Francis, tells of memories of her parents being married at Lebanon Church and of her Aunt working there on staff.

San Francisco Presbytery was changing as well and soon gained an activist majority. By 1968, the Presbytery had become deeply divided over controversies to fund Angela Davis and other civil Rights issues. The Presbytery appointed a commission to survey the neighborhood's potential for a new church development more responsive to social change.

By 1977, a café-and-bookshop culture was emerging. Rev. Carl Smith began leading a "house church" style worship in a corner of the chancel behind the rows of ancient theater seats. A church brochure from that time read "What can you make with an old church, a creative community, and a changing neighborhood?" The following year, the San Francisco Examiner reported that Rev. Smith had blessed a new trash can installed on 24th Street between Noe and Castro, calling it "a useful instrument of our care of one another."

In 1984, with the help of denominational funds, Noe Valley Ministry was incorporated with Rev. Carl Smith installed as the Ministry's first pastor. Former Lebanon member and charter member of the new ministry, Elizabeth Rusk describes this as "A new branch grafted into the roots of the past."

In keeping with the times, the congregation was community-oriented, emphasizing eastern meditation, social justice and a non-traditional structure attractive to the community of artists, activists and spiritual seekers. Inclusive language was required and a three-ring binder hymnal with inclusive lyrics was used. At times God was referred to as Goddess.

Innovative hands-on, play-based church school lessons took place before worship though retaining families with children, continued to be a struggle. During the pastor's vacation, congregation members volunteered to speak in what would later become the cherished tradition known as Summer Share.

Under Rev. Smith's charismatic leadership, the church building was soon buzzing with activity. The Cooperative Nursery School remained an anchor tenant. The Noe Valley Music series (founded in 1982 by Larry Kassin) and the Noe Valley Chamber Music series (founded in 1992) often had more than 100 in attendance at concerts. With Gallery Sanchez hosting shows by local artists, Scottish Country Dancers, 12-step recovery programs, yoga, Tai chi, Democratic Club meetings, Irish Dance for Kids—to name a few—the building was never quiet. Church volunteers handed out free burritos at the Noe Valley Street Fair.

The congregation was politically active, participating in Livermore Lab protests, the Gay Pride parade and becoming a MoreLight church committed to supporting one of its lesbian members for ordination. NVM was also a Sanctuary Church supporting illegal refugees from South of the Border. Eight of Noe Valley's current members and supporters joined the ministry during this exciting period of in the following interim.

In 1996, after an innovative nineteen-year ministry, Rev. Smith retired under the cloud of an inappropriate parishioner relationship. The toll of secret-keeping was felt by the few aware of the relationship before it became public. The congregation divided into those who felt unsafe and left the church and those who took a more forgiving "boys will be boys" attitude. The issue was never resolved and the congregation never really healed.

Inadequate information from the Presbytery, led to tension with the congregation that carried over into the next two years with a more traditional interim pastor. During that interim time, the congregation was also engaged in a new roof project. Then it became embroiled in neighborhood protests over a cell phone tower.

Despite Rev. Smith's flaws, there was heartfelt gratitude for his vision of the church as a community center for the arts and social activism at a time when there were few innovative models. Seven current NVM members and supporters

joined during Smith's ministry, another member joined during the following interim. Phoebe McAfee, Margaret Bean, Cindy Cake, Kay Coleman, Dawn Summers, Kathy Willems, Irene Kaufman, Karen Heather (interim period). Of the 16 current active members, 9 (have been involved for 25 yrs from 1999 to 2024)

Proudest Days

- Worship open to other spiritual traditions with active lay planning and participation
- Social justice activism, protests, AIDS support, MoreLight congregation, Sanctuary for illegal immigrants
- Community center for neighborhood groups, for music and the arts (including a Bobby McFerrin Concert), and a cooperative nursery school.
- Raised funds for a new roof

Difficult Days

- Founding pastor retires under cloud from inappropriate parishioner relationship; congregation inadequately informed by Presbytery
- Difficult two-year adjustment to a more traditional Presbyterian interim pastor
- Neighborhood demonstrations against NVM's potential for cell phone antennae damage community relations

Continuing the Arts and Music Community Center Vision, 1998-2012:

In 1998, Rev. Keenan Kelsey was installed as the congregation's second pastor. During Rev. Kelsey's fourteen-year pastorate, in addition to its interest in other spiritual traditions, the congregation re-connected with its Christian identity in the Reformed Presbyterian tradition. Spiritual practices and planning for celebrations of the liturgical seasons became important to the lives of members.

The congregation confirmed its mission as "A House of Prayer, A House of Community"—a gathering place for artists and community events. Its reputation expanded city-wide. Members participated actively in homeless feedings through the Martin de Porres House of Hospitality and participated in the annual interfaith 'Feeding of the Brothers' by serving homeless men several nights each year. The congregation also provided financial support for global mission in Guatemala and Uganda and local mission through San Francisco's Network Ministries.

As early as 2002, this small congregation of under fifty members began to plan to bring its historic 1888 building into 21st century, making it ADA accessible and seismically safe. A tri-faith dream blossomed. It was hoped a renovated building could serve as a Tri-Faith place of worship for a Jewish and an Islamic community of faith together with the Christian community of NVM. Physical changes to the building began to be designed to accommodate the needs of the Muslim and Jewish congregations. For example, Muslims needed water for cleansing and a dedicated carpeted area while the Jewish community required more security and a kosher kitchen.

Not wanting to think of itself as a “landlord,” the congregation preferred to use the term “building sharers” rather than “tenants.” However, having a “shared” relationship in terms of building responsibilities did not turn out equitable and much of the congregation’s time and energy went to dealing with building issues, events and programs. The congregation began to discuss the possibility of a new relationship with building participants that would allow for better stewardship of the congregation’s time. The congregation was greatly disappointed when these interfaith discussions fell apart. One of the factors in the Tri-faith failure was that the other two communities looked upon themselves as tenants and not building sharers.

Proudest Days

- “A House of Prayer, A House of Community”—a community center for arts and music, along with social justice advocacy, continue as the congregation’s central ministry
- Worship becomes more Reformed, celebrating the liturgical year with active lay planning and participation; relevant Biblically-based preaching, anti-bias/non-hierarchical language and openness to other spiritual traditions continue to be priorities
- Painting a labyrinth on the sanctuary floor with monthly labyrinth walks
- Excellence in pastoral care, building a faith community, welcoming and spiritual worship leadership, envisioning social justice
- Strong choir, music director and administrative support
- Summer Share
- Advocacy continues for LGBT ordination until PCUSA recognizes gay ordination and marriage

- Tri-faith dialogue creates an energizing vision for building use.
- A small congregation of 25 to 50 members plans for a \$4.1million building renovation and intentionally creates a stronger congregational presence in building design details.

Difficult Days

- Inability to move Tri-Faith vision forward
- Renovation plans revised several times
- Congregation moves to St. Luke's hospital two years before ground-breaking on site
- Three years of worship in St. Luke's chapel (3/2011-10/2014)
- Pastor's illness and pending retirement leads to some burn-out among congregants
- Initial interim pastoral relationship has difficulties

Entering a Newly Renovated Building, 2014- 2022:

With great excitement, in 2014, the congregation moved back into its newly renovated building. No longer with the homey, ramshackle appeal of a traditional community center, a greatly expanded sanctuary now opened onto an inlaid labyrinth, a soaring stained-glass window and a Ruth Asawa cross. These three inspiring symbols are central to the congregation's identity as a worshipping community.

Following Rev. Kelsey's 2013 retirement, the congregation went through a rocky interim until Rev. David Brown was hired in 2014 as the second interim pastor. A year later, Rev. Brown was called as Noe Valley Ministry's third pastor. Covid restrictions began while Rev. Brown was on sabbatical in New Zealand. He returned to skillfully lead the staff through the transition to worshipping online. Throughout the covid years, he continued to upgrade the building's technological capacity, and build a strong online community.

Sermons were well-crafted, exegetical and skillfully delivered. With increasing national awareness of the impact of white privilege, sermons became more politicized, emphasizing the congregation's progressive identity. Some members began to feel that worship had become too formal and academic, lacking in spiritual nurture. There was less lay involvement in the liturgical planning that the congregation had previously valued so highly. With a strong background in

classical music, Rev. Brown developed a bi-monthly “Sunday for the Soul” worship supplemented with musical guests and members of his own talented family.

Through the efforts of one highly organized member, who recently died, the congregation planned, prepared and served dinners at a homeless shelter for one to three evenings annually. Other members served regularly at Martin de Porres soup kitchen up until it closed for Covid. For a time, two members organized the congregation to prepare and distribute bag lunches to unhoused people on the streets. A five-member racial justice team actively supported the Presbytery’s regional anti-racism work with in-kind services for accounting, leadership and weekly resource posts. The team participated in a collaborative regional anti-racism project called Grace and Restoration developing several worship services and conversations to explore white privilege. Currently, members are involved in the Presbytery’s Holy Currencies training.

The 2014 Mission Study reflected the congregation’s excited anticipation and strong sense of vision upon its return to a carefully designed, renovated building. However, the Mission Study goals may have been overly ambitious, failing to consider the actual energy level of a smaller, aging congregation or the pastoral skills needed to help implement the vision, or the increased impact of neighborhood gentrification.

Even before entering the 20th century, the Noe Valley neighborhood began to undergo successive waves of gentrification as the hippie/activist generation aged or moved to the suburbs. Noe Valley became an upscale community of techie commuters from Silicon Valley, gay professionals and double income families (DINC’s) with nannies.

Much like their more “hippie” predecessors, today’s professionals are likely to think of themselves as spiritual but disillusioned with, even hostile to, the established church. By contrast, the Noe Valley congregation sees itself as an inclusive, spiritually-accepting, progressive congregation in the Reformed Christian tradition. Coming from a diversity of beliefs and religious backgrounds, many members were originally un-churched or had left the Church as youth before finding the Ministry—with its worship enriched by the arts, music, and dance—as their spiritual home.

However, communicating the congregation's Christian identity in a language that speaks to an un-churched, sophisticated urban population, continues to be a difficult task. Prior to renovation, worship attendance hovered between 25 to 50 members for about 25 years. Not everyone returned to the newly renovated church, however. Post-renovation, post-Covid attendance now averages 12 to 18 worshippers.

Proudest Days

- Sold parking lot to create Noe Valley Town Square
- Celebrated return to newly renovated building with stained glass window and inlaid labyrinth.
- Developed the building's technological capacity during Covid with a strong online community.
- Amory Donahue Language-in-Action Preschool, a for-profit Spanish Immersion, becomes market-rate anchor tenant with 10-year contract for three downstairs rooms.
- Participated in Regional Grace and Restoration Anti-Racism Project by providing in-kind services for finances and weekly posts
- Music for the Soul worship services
- Strong choir, music director and administrative staff

Difficult Days

- Difficult 2013 Interim Pastorate
- Building users are often unaware that a community of faith stands at the center of Noe Valley Ministry. It is one thing to draw the community into the building and, yet another, to engage participants in congregational life.
- Budget more dependent on rentals with less community engagement. Still struggling to figure out how to achieve a healthy and just landlord/tenant relationship where a percentage of rents are kept affordable for non-profits.
- Though the weekends are heavily scheduled with concerts and events, except for the anchor tenant preschool, the building is mostly empty during the week. Rental income sustains the budget but, though rates are decreased at times for groups congruent with NVM's mission, they are unaffordable for non-profits.
- Initial issues with Building Elevator, lighting, etc
- Covid online worship

- Worship more formal and politicized. Laity misses involvement in worship planning, spiritual nurture and faith community gatherings.
- Uncertainty about how to engage in mission as partnership rather than privileged benevolence
- COM has difficulty finding Interim Pastor in 2022