“No matter who you are, or where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here.”

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church

Redwood City
These words open every service at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Redwood City, California, and our community cherishes the ideals embodied in this statement. A typical Sunday will find people of varied ethnicities, ages, financial statuses, sexual and/or gender identities, past experiences of church, and confidence in their beliefs. A truly diverse group gathers to worship, and when it comes time to pass the peace, every one of those congregants will find themselves greeted repeatedly and with genuine enthusiasm. We join hands as a singular community as we say the Lord's prayer. All who seek God and are drawn to Christ are welcome at God’s table and we further celebrate this in our post communion hymn “All Are Welcome.”

St. Peter’s is a church focused on acceptance and on welcoming and supporting our neighbors. Many of our members cite the thorough welcome they received when first attending as their reason for coming back and the invitation to participate in our ministries as their reason for staying. Most of our outreach ministries are focused in our local community. We are a church that seeks to emulate the radical acceptance of Jesus Christ and that aspires to create a community where everyone can know the truth that they are a valued and necessary part of the Church.

On a recent Sunday, a young man wandered through the doors after service had begun. He was invited to join us in the pews and to receive communion, but chose to stay at the back of the church. But when he was invited to join us for coffee hour, he came. He sat at one of our two tables that Sunday and spent close to 40 minutes talking with one parishioner in particular. He seemed to have much on his mind that he wanted to share. Although he has not returned since that Sunday, we were able to be the welcoming place he needed that day.
Our Worship Community

Our most recent Easter Vigil is a wonderful illustration of what many of us cherish about worship at St. Peter’s. Some worshippers were wearing jeans and others were in dresses, and all mingled easily while waiting for the start of the service. We began in the courtyard, where a slightly overenthusiastic application of lighter fluid and an unexpectedly brisk wind made for a dramatic lighting of the flame. Several people rushed in to help, ensuring that the Vigil didn’t become memorable for the wrong reasons, and our interim rector continued. After moving into the sanctuary, the various readings were taken by different members of the congregation, and the familiar stories were presented in new ways. For example, the Creation story was read from a children’s book, and the congregation got to look at all the pictures. The service moved to the back of the sanctuary, where a mother and her toddler daughter were welcomed to the community of faith with baptism. At the service’s end, we all adjourned to the parish hall for a celebratory supper. This celebration captures what worship is like at St. Peter’s. There’s a respect for the importance of the ritual and an appreciation of tradition, but also room for spontaneity and openness to the new and unexpected.

This was a service where unexpected things happened, and our community easily adapted and worked to handle them effectively. This was a service where the ancient Scriptures were central, but presented in ways that allowed us to see them anew. This was a service where decades-long veterans of our church joined with a two-year-old to worship the risen Lord. In this moment, and in so many moments at St. Peter’s, you could simultaneously feel a deep spiritual reverence as well as our scrappy human enthusiasm. It wasn’t flawless, but it was profoundly good. And then we ate together afterwards, which is St. Peter’s at its best.

“People ask me [an eleven-year-old acolyte who serves in her socks] why I take off my shoes. It’s because when we go inside at my house, we don’t wear our shoes. St. Peter’s is my home, and when I’m at home I take off my shoes.”
Our Ministries

In support of our regular worship services, members of the congregation participate in the traditional areas of ministry as altar guild members, eucharistic ministers, lectors, acolytes, choir members, and ushers.

Our ministries for children and youth consist of: Godly Play for younger children; opportunities to participate as acolytes for slightly older children, and St. Peter’s Youth Group for grades 5th-10th. Currently due to the size of the congregation and the wide age range amongst the families with children, each of these ministries is on hiatus with hopes to revive and grow in the coming years.

Pastoral care includes a monthly visit to Hopkins Manor, a nearby assisted living facility, to offer its residents the opportunity to share in the bread and wine. In addition to the pastoral care provided by our interim rector, members of the congregation informally visit members who are homebound.

St. Peter’s Players, primarily made up of members of the congregation, provides a form of fellowship while putting on shows that entertain both our congregation and folks outside of our worshipping community.

Another aspect of fellowship involves occasional activities for fun. Game Night is an intergenerational gathering. Community trips also provide ways for the congregation to experience together a museum visit, seeing a member of the congregation in a play, etc.

Given the size of St. Peter’s church facility and adjacent properties, another important area of ministry is for buildings and grounds - overseeing the care, maintenance, and repair of our properties. We have been able to complete upgrades to our sanctuary and sacristy with funds raised as part of the Diocesan Expanding Horizons Campaign - St. Peter’s being one of the first congregations in the diocese to launch the campaign. Through semi-monthly work days, members of the congregation and some of our tenants work together to service the needs of our facility.

St. Peter’s participates in several regular Outreach Ministries that benefit our community and neighbors. Each month, our Day Laborer Ministry prepares bag lunches and distributes them to local day laborers. St. Peter’s members also prepare dinner for the Maple Street homeless shelter, and we periodically collaborate with the Catholic Worker House and our direct neighbor, Sequoia High School, to collect needed items in seasonal drives. Our outreach ministries are largely focused in our own neighborhood, and each ministry has deeply committed volunteers that keep it going.
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Our Vision for the Future

The people of St. Peter’s recognize that the last ten years have been a period of decline, at least in terms of attendance. We also feel, however, that we are in a time of powerful revitalization and redevelopment. While we know that having fewer people creates limits, we are also excited about the possibilities. We seek to understand the opportunities afforded us by being a smaller, but tightly-knit and passionately committed church. There may not be as many of us as there once were, but those of us who are here and who are joining are enthusiastic and driven. One member of our worshipping community said that St. Peter’s is Redwood City’s best kept secret, and we are interested in letting more folks in on the secret. While this could take the form of expanding our profile in the community, we know that it is also likely to come from a renewed focus on the work God has called our church to do. People are attracted to a sense of purpose and to the opportunity to have an impact.

We have many ideas about possible goals for the future. We hope to grow in number, and especially to continue adding families and children, but we also hope to grow in spirit and direction. Many congregants are interested in extending our outreach to the unhoused people in our area. There is considerable interest in furthering our work with other local churches, as well as with the tenants who share our physical space. St. Peter’s seeks to marshal the considerable resources that we do have to increase the acts of love we can bring to our neighbors.
Our Ideal Rector

St. Peter’s seeks a rector that can help us to hone our vision. We are rich in some ways and struggle in others, and we hope to find a priest who can help us determine how a congregation like ours can best live out the love of Jesus in our community.

We are looking for a good communicator, cognizant that the most crucial part of communication is listening. We are a church of people with varying levels of comfort with technology, so we need a rector who can communicate well in both writing and speaking to parishioners of many ages and backgrounds. Administrative and/or business acumen would be a plus, in order to help us be better stewards of the resources we have and to help us reflect on the best use of our facilities. We hope that our new rector will actively participate in our ministries. We are looking for a rector who can help us to build consensus within our church and expand on our connections with our broader community.

As for preaching style, we hope that our new rector will be attendant to the day’s Scripture, but also able to connect the passage to contemporary contexts. Many in our worshipping community have particularly appreciated sermons where the speaker educates us about the relevant historical and cultural context for the Scripture. Many of us have backgrounds in other denominations, and so would appreciate occasional explanation of the specific rites and beliefs of the Episcopal Church. We are open to engagement and nontraditional forms of preaching.

We are a community that is happy to try new things, and we hope that our next rector will engage us in that process, understanding the traditions that we hold dear while leading us into a new phase for our beloved church family.

“I am a Christian, but I’m a Christian with a lot of questions and doubts. St. Peter’s is a place where I don’t have to pretend to be any more confident or spiritual than I am, and where I know I can find people willing to walk with me while I seek answers.”
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Our Congregation

We are a small congregation that can remember a time when our numbers were greater.

Currently, St. Peter’s has a strong core group of people who attend Sunday worship services. The 8 am service has a small group (<20) who likes to rise early and start the day with worship in the chapel in order to continue their Sunday with other activities. The 10:30 service, held in the main sanctuary has larger attendance (20-40). We occasionally hold joint services at 10:30am to bring these two groups together in worship for special occasions.

As with many Episcopal churches in the Diocese of California, changing demographics have led to a decrease in attendance at Sunday worship in recent years. The high cost of living has made it difficult for some parishioners to remain in the area. At the same time, we recognize and have learned from the few major disagreements or conflicts that led to significant drops in attendance and loss of leadership within our community. In many ways, this is why we seek a rector who is a good communicator, who actively participates in our ministries, and who can help build consensus within our congregation.

While St. Peter’s enjoys the intimacy of a small congregation, the number of baptized members at St. Peter’s is about 170, and we would like to rebuild the number of attendees to Sunday worship back to the beginning of this decade when Sunday attendance was closer to 100 and number of baptized members far exceeded 200.

This decline concerns us, but we also celebrate the resiliency and commitment of our members, and the fact that newer members can so quickly become comfortable in our community. Our members are deeply invested in St. Peter’s and excited about what God has in store for our church going forward.

“In the aftermath of the Orlando Nightclub Shooting in 2016, I was feeling pretty shaken. With our rector’s support, I decided to come out to the congregation during our Sunday worship service: ‘I’m a transgender person. I want you to know how vulnerable I am feeling at this time and that St. Peter’s feels like a safe place for me.’ Following that service, I was and continue to be embraced both spiritually and physically in ways I had not expected and from people whom I would not have expected.”
Where We Are

St. Peter’s is located in Redwood City, California, a Bay Area town located about thirty miles south of San Francisco and 25 miles north of San Jose. Redwood City’s official slogan is “Climate Best by Government Test.” Redwood City indeed has fantastic weather and in many other ways is a wonderful place to live. We benefit from all the opportunities offered by proximity to San Francisco and San Jose, while also keeping the charms of a smaller city.

Redwood City is a diverse town of approximately 85,000 people. 60% of the population identifies as white while 37% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, including recent immigrants, long time residents, and mixed status families. Although the median income for Redwood City is $99,026, 12% of households earn less than $25,000/year and 6% live below the Federal Poverty Level. Redwood City had the highest number of unsheltered homeless individuals in the county - 221 of 901 during the January 2019 One Day Homeless Count.

The growth of the tech industry and the high cost of housing has impacted Redwood City as it has other Bay Area communities - resulting in both growth and changing demographics of the City. St. Peter’s has lost members to the high cost of housing while new members are part of the City’s growing population. Our members are largely current and former teachers, current and former health professionals, researchers, non-profit managers, tech industry professionals, artists, musicians, office and retail workers, and retirees.

St. Peter’s has a large facility that features a newly renovated sanctuary with cushioned, modular seating that can be arranged traditionally or in ways to create a more intimate setting; a parish hall with a newly-renovated commercial-grade kitchen; a chapel which has also functioned as a small theatre; and various classrooms and offices. We also own two apartments and a small single story office building that are adjacent to the church. Though much of the building is at least sixty years old, it is in generally good condition. The building and adjacent property have multiple long-term tenants, including a Montessori preschool, a catering company, a boys’ choir, and an optometry office. These renters are important contributors to St. Peter’s financial stability. Several addiction recovery groups use the space, as well as a small Tongan congregation that uses the sanctuary on Sunday afternoons.

Finances + Budget

While St. Peter’s is currently operating with a balanced budget, we have little to no unrestricted reserves. 70% of the income comes from property rentals with primarily long term tenants. As such, finances and budget will need to continue to be a strong focus for a new rector and the vestry.

We encourage you to learn more about our church by visiting our website at stpetersrwc.org.