

Demographics

Trabuco Presbyterian Church is located in the city of Trabuco Canyon in South Orange County, California. Most of the church members and visitors come from two Zip Codes: 92688 and 92679. The community was created about 30 years ago and is the home of some of the nation's most wealthy households. The population in these two zip codes is 80,980. Just over 70% of the total population is White (Non-Hispanic). About 10% are Asian and the Hispanic or Latino represent 15%.

According to U.S. Census data, almost 44% of the population of 92679 are America's wealthiest. This group is described as: The nation's most wealthy households are financially secure with expensive tastes, living the most luxurious of lifestyles in the most affluent and exclusive communities. 42% of the population in 92688 are New Suburban Families. These families are young, affluent working couples with pre-school children. Their lives concentrate around their children as they shuttle them between sports and other activities.

The church reflects the same range of economic and other demographic parameters as do the overall community.

History of the Church

The following historical recap of Trabuco Presbyterian was captured from the recorded notes of a structured oral retelling of each of four eras in TPC history. Each era was 4 or 5 years of time starting with the founding of the church in 1988. A group of more than 60 church members divided up into the particular eras in which they joined TPC. They gathered from each participant the strengths and struggles of their era and recorded these historical recollections.¹

Each era labeled itself as follows:

1988 – 1993	“Fresh”
1994 – 1998	“Growing”
1999 – 2004	“Hope with Stifled Action”
2005 – 2009	“Opportunity / Introspective / Transition”

Each era reported strengths / struggles that were unique to that era. But many themes came back again and again, including:

- ❖ Size – from earliest days, TPC has always been very aware of its size, particularly its relative size. First, as a pioneering new church that was small things in a big way. Now, TPC is no longer growing and very aware of the nearby mega-church (Saddleback). The excitement of pioneering a new church led to ambitions that prompted the church again and again to stretch to accomplish ambitious goals, sometimes without as many volunteers or resources as the projects might have needed.

¹ This summary attempts to give the patterns, frequent responses and trends of the Vision Day input. A complete listing of all the data is also available from the church.

- ❖ Culture of Welcome – a small church at the outset, members enjoyed being needed and noticed. 10 years later, members were still finding the welcoming outreach of the no longer new church as a reason to join TPC. This same era found TPC's "real" people (not contrived) as a particular strength of the church. And even the newest members of the church were attracted by the friendship and camaraderie they found at TPC. They value that the church has successfully turned to itself for strength in the present difficult time of change.
- ❖ Family Orientation – in the early days, some in the community thought TPC was a pre-school, not a church. The families in the new church appreciated the policies of infant baptism and flexibility. Within 5 years, new members were attracted by TPC's children's program and its many young families. In another few years, new members pointed out Vacation Bible School, H2O and other youth programs as part of their reasons to join TPC. The selection of the Youth Pastor was an important milestone. Members joining in the past few years have been attracted by the growing children's ministry.
- ❖ Music – Founding members thought the music was new and different. Within a few years after the church's inception, new members were attracted in part by the music. Still today, the church's music is a strength some of the most recent new members find at TPC.
- ❖ Funding – In early days the relatively few expenses demanded only modest support. A building campaign to create a place and a building permanently for TPC may have assumed continued growth in the congregation and the area's economy. Inaccurate records make the tracking the middle years' growth difficult, but the most recent years show shrinking revenues and a struggle to cover mortgage payments without sacrificing programs.

The People of the TPC Congregation

The same oral history methods described above solicited impressions of the TPC members about themselves. The groups sharing the following perceptions consisted of church members from all eras of the church working in groups of about ten. All members of the church were invited to participate.

Scores of descriptive adjectives and phrases often resonated with common themes above, including:

- ❖ White, middle class, suburban families, well-educated, homogenous community
- ❖ Family oriented
- ❖ Friendly, caring, fellowship, tolerant, non-judgmental, not a mega-church
- ❖ Pro-active, participatory,
- ❖ Mission, challenge ourselves to reach out to others
- ❖ Bible based faith, called by God, serious about discipleship

The Best Characteristics of TPC Members

The 60 or so TPC members next narrowed the long list of descriptors above to highlight TPC members value most about themselves:

- ❖ Welcoming / nurturing Christian family TPC welcomes, serves and reaches out to families, real people
- ❖ Christian Faith
- ❖ Passionate, hungry, determined
- ❖ People of the church – many stick with TPC in difficult times because of their commitment and relationship with the people in the TPC congregation
- ❖ Work of the church – TPC does good work
- ❖ Size & familiarity – we value a church small enough to allow everyone to know each other, everyone is important, noticed, cared for and missed when they are not with us.
- ❖ Non-judgmental / inclusive across economic and other differences

Reasons People Join TPC

Familiar themes are repeated in Vision Day's analysis of this important issue.

- ❖ Welcome, the people of TPC
- ❖ Children's programs
- ❖ Theology
- ❖ Music
- ❖ Size of TPC
- ❖ Proximity / Convenience. TPC is a local church for many of its congregants.

Reasons People Do Not Join TPC

People visit the church but do not always join. Others know about TPC, live nearby and still do not attend. Some others have left the church. TPC is anxious to reach new members. Our knowledge as to why we do not always reach these potential TPC members includes:

- ❖ Lives are too busy
- ❖ TPC is seen as a sinking ship
- ❖ Financial burdens of the TPC
- ❖ No advantage to being a member / not a "joiner"

Reasons People Stay at TPC

Notwithstanding the stress of too few volunteers to cover the many commitments, the revenue budget shortfalls, and the uncertainty of a transition in pastors, many families at the core of the church remain. Those staying have reasons that harmonize with some of the strengths and characteristics cited above:

- ❖ Acceptance, love, involved, feel needed
- ❖ Agree with the theology of the church
- ❖ The people of TPC – the fellow members of the congregation include relationships that will last lifetimes.
- ❖ Music / Band / Choir
- ❖ Adult Education, ARTS (Adults Redefining Themselves), Bible Study
- ❖ Children's programs

TPC's Areas of Greatest Hunger for Change

The stressed, overcommitted core membership is largely staying on for the next stage of the church's history. They are hungry for changes, including:

- ❖ Dynamic leadership, higher profile in the community, marketing strategy for growth
- ❖ More members, fill the sanctuary
- ❖ Financial stability
- ❖ Finish the building project
- ❖ Bring hope, enthusiasm and future focus

What Skills and Characteristics Would We Like to See in the New Pastor?

The reflections upon history, reflections upon ourselves and current circumstances suggest traits and competencies the new pastor must possess:

- ❖ Charismatic, visionary
- ❖ Great preacher with teaching sermons that are theologically balanced, teaching the entire Bible
- ❖ Good administrator, staff leader, organizational skills, humanitarian
- ❖ Transparent, vulnerable, honest, accessible, consensus builder
- ❖ Experienced with children's and youth ministries
- ❖ Proven congregation builder

What Would We Like to Communicate to the New Pastor?

The right pastor with the requisite skills and characteristics will need to know quickly what the key issues are for TPC. The "entry plan" will be as important as the skills and capabilities the pastor must bring to this new calling. We believe the following should be uppermost in the initial plans of the next pastor at TPC:

- ❖ Preach Jesus. Share the gospel by teaching us, challenging us
- ❖ Inspire us, lead by example
- ❖ We are hungry for change. There is a short window of time to reinspire a weary core group that stayed through times of difficult change.
- ❖ Fill the sanctuary. 500 families have attended TPC at some time. Invite them back.
- ❖ Help us finish the campus build out.
- ❖ The pastor works for Session.
- ❖ Be accessible, "one of us", report with real numbers, heal & restore us.
- ❖ Become an active visible presence in Rancho Santa Margarita. Live and play locally.