



Congregational Profile Old Cambridge Baptist Church 2024

Old Cambridge Baptist Church
1151 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 864-9275

Please contact Ron Bouthillette at The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts,
bouthillette@tabcom.org to apply

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Section 1: Introduction | 3 |
| Section 2: Goals & Vision | 3 |
| What we want to do and what we want our pastor to do..... | 3 |
| Section 3: Our Story | 4 |
| Past Ministers (the “modern era”)..... | 5 |
| Social Justice Activism..... | 7 |
| Our Church Building..... | 11 |
| Section 4: Church Life Today | 11 |
| Worship Life..... | 11 |
| Congregational Life..... | 12 |
| Current Ministers..... | 13 |
| Lay Ministry..... | 14 |
| How We Work Together..... | 15 |
| Building and Building Ministry..... | 16 |
| Church Celebrations and Events..... | 16 |
| Financial Summary..... | 17 |
| Section 5: What We Believe | 17 |
| Section 6: How Others See Us | 20 |
| Appendices | 22 |
| Demographic Information..... | 22 |
| Organizational Chart..... | 24 |
| Covenant of Old Cambridge Baptist Church..... | 25 |
| Behavioral Covenant..... | 26 |
| Mission Statement..... | 27 |

Section 1: Introduction

Old Cambridge Baptist Church (OCBC) is a congregation that places a high value on caring for one another, for the community as a whole, and for the wider world.

Since the early 1960s, social justice has been a dominant mission and practice of the church's ministry and membership. In particular, OCBC has been actively involved in anti-war efforts, racial justice, creation justice, refugee and immigration ministries, including the sanctuary movement, prison ministry and, notably, LGBTQIA+ concerns and affirmation. Many members became part of the community because of the congregation's commitment to social justice and are actively involved in the church's groups that attempt to address these concerns.

There is a deep-seated belief that everyone is welcome at OCBC, including all faiths, as well as those who are curious, those who are seeking and those who profess no faith. The congregation welcomes visitors and newcomers, with the pastor and members greeting them with genuine interest and following up as appropriate.

At a recent leadership retreat, *radical love* was named as an identifying characteristic of OCBC. This is love that is not just sentimental but grounded in justice, compassion, and a desire for the well-being of all creation.

This congregation is deeply rooted in Baptist history and practice. Over the years, that has become an increasingly progressive identity. OCBC would easily be counted among the most progressive, perhaps even radical, Baptist congregations in the USA, not only for its emphasis on justice but also for its creative engagement of both theology and ecclesiology. Many members do come from other (and no) faith traditions. So, being Baptist is important, though perhaps not definitive, for the ongoing life of the congregation.

Section 2: Goals & Vision

What we want to do and what we want our *pastor* to do

When considering OCBC's path for the next five years, there is a noticeable desire for growth, diversity, and inclusivity among congregants. There is a collective desire for OCBC to expand its congregation, particularly by attracting and retaining young families and diverse demographics. Emphasizing a transgenerational community and increased vibrancy in intergenerational relationships, OCBC envisions a future where its membership reflects a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, and life experiences, fostering a rich tapestry of communal engagement and spiritual exploration.

Simultaneously, OCBC envisions itself as a welcoming haven where all are embraced, regardless of differences or backgrounds. This commitment to inclusivity extends to racial diversity, LGBTQIA+

affirmation, and multicultural representation, reflecting a deep-seated belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Through sustained efforts to embody expansive hospitality and create a nurturing environment, OCBC aims to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, ensuring that its doors remain open to all who seek refuge, community, and spiritual nourishment. OCBC leaders and members want to have an impact in the community, from participating in Pride events to being arrested at environmental protests.

Moreover, OCBC's vision for the future encompasses innovation in worship, vibrant music ministry, and an enhanced use of its physical infrastructure to enrich communal life. As it navigates a generational transition in leadership, OCBC aspires to be guided by dynamic and visionary pastors who embody intellectual rigor, capacity for progressive evangelism, and pastoral care. Preaching is important, and congregants expect to be challenged and inspired by their minister. We hope our pastor can connect the head and the heart; balancing thinking and spirituality to weave human connections in the community. OCBC is a lay-led congregation; pastoral leadership is respected but decisions and directions are determined by lay leaders in consultation and cooperation with the congregation and its pastor(s). That said, the congregation has a history of embracing and supporting creative leadership from its pastors. There is an openness to exploring and experimenting with different ways of being church. This is crucial as churches everywhere, including OCBC, are faced with widespread critique and abandonment of the traditional church throughout the Western world.

Grounded in a commitment to spiritual cultivation, radical hospitality, and social justice, OCBC seeks to continue its legacy of service, advocacy, and radical love, envisioning a future where its ministries resonate with vitality, relevance, and transformative impact.

Section 3: Our Story

Throughout its 180-year history, the church has used various ministries to meet a range of social needs and interests. From its founding until 1900, the church operated a Sabbath School for as many as 300 local children. Since the early 1900s, the congregation has actively offered ministries for the many nearby college students. The church has maintained an arts ministry since at least the mid 1950s.

OCBC has been on the forefront of progressive Christianity for many years, hosting speakers such as Paul Tillich and engaging members such as Harvey Cox. Throughout its tenure, the church membership has included runaway slaves, soldiers who fought and/or died in the Civil War as well as World Wars I and II, peace activists, civil rights leaders, and others who worked on behalf of the homeless, minorities, and refugees.

In the 1970s, OCBC took a stand for social justice by contributing \$50,000 to establish the Black Community Fund and serving as a sanctuary for protestors against the war in Vietnam. The church also adopted the use of inclusive language in worship, and supported the ordination of women. From 1975-1990 OCBC had female pastors. In the mid-1980s OCBC joined the national Sanctuary movement by becoming a Sanctuary Church and welcoming a political refugee from El Salvador.

OCBC was a founding member of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists and the first church to join the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry. OCBC also housed the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian civil and political rights organization in the U.S. All of the lead pastors since 1975 have been gay or lesbian. The congregation has worked hard for equality and racial and environmental justice and has made space available for other groups who are also working for a better world. See further details on our history of social justice activism and how past pastors contributed to our evolution in the sections below.

Past Ministers (the “modern era”)

The Rev. Sam Miller, 1935-1958 – The primary themes of his ministry were worship as the essence of church, importance of the arts (drama, poetry, etchings), transcendent reality of God in everyday life, social justice, service to students, the elderly, and service members. Two of his sons were killed in WWII. A “poet of prayer,” an intellectual (and a visual artist), he later became Dean of Harvard Divinity School.

The Rev. Ernst “Ernie” Klein, 1959-1974 – Ernie Klein was more liberal than some members. His theology was based on spiritual accountability via social justice actions. He also encouraged lay ministry: In 1969, he took a sabbatical and a 50/50 lay ministry shared duties with him. In 1971, this arrangement was formalized, adding more tension between the pastor and some of the congregation. When the “question authority” and counterculture youth movements surfaced, OCBC was ready to change with the times. An early performance of Godspell, ministries to street people, more diverse and progressive services, the formation of Common Place in 1973 (an alternative intentional living community), a commitment to women’s leadership and gender neutral language (called for by a women’s group called Sojourners), civil rights actions, and antiwar activities were central ministries during his tenure. Ernie also encouraged the arts and was, himself, a talented visual artist.

The Rev. Monica Styron, 1980-1988 - An ecumenical leader and spokesperson for many social justice issues like shelter and food for the homeless, she had a gift for the personal dimension of healing, even while “fighting the good fight.” She attracted many young people and was a dynamic presence. Her coming out as a lesbian and the church’s 1983 declaration that it is “Welcoming and Affirming” were brave acts at the time. Also brave was OCBC’s leadership in becoming a Sanctuary church for the then-undocumented trade union activist

from El Salvador and its historical biblical interpretation of sanctuary, calling it an allegiance to a higher law that demanded protection for the oppressed.

The Rev. Dr. Meg Hess, Interim Pastor 1988-1990 and again 2011-2013 – Meg brought her training as a pastoral psychotherapist to assist the congregation in reflecting on its history, dynamics, priorities, ways of functioning, mission, and identity. Her caring counseling one-on-one, her administrative juggling, and her story-telling talents as a preacher were crucial in leading and comforting the congregation in these times of change. She also shared her skills as a labyrinth facilitator who offered her labyrinth walks as a spiritual practice of walking meditation and healing reflection.

The Rev. C. Irving Cummings, 1990-2011 - A progressive Christian in the prophetic tradition, his sermons often referenced 'empire' then and now, in terms of allegiance to a higher authority than Rome or the current U.S. government. He was also committed to social justice, especially gay rights, environmental justice, anti-war actions, and an embrace of all faiths as allies. His worship services and other activities displayed a creative and sometimes playful approach. Irv established pet blessings on St. Francis Day, display of loved ones on the altar on All Saints' Sunday, a city-wide silent 'Station of the Cross' walk on Palm Sunday, and annual Twelfth Night parties at his home. His sermons were deeply historical and intellectual. He was an out gay man and former Presbyterian. He was a founding member of AWAB in 1993 and supported the gay marriage equality campaign.

The Rev. Cody J. Sanders, PhD (2015-2023) - During his eight-year tenure at OCBC, Cody was particularly skilled at preaching by delivering engaging, educational, intellectual, and inspiring sermons that brought a culturally sensitive and well-balanced fresh take on traditionally held views of the bible. His theology emphasized a personal relationship with God, and focused the congregation on what Jesus and the bible have to say about the world we live in and how we should live in it, while at the same time encouraging the members to think personally about their own theology. He also creatively used liturgy around rituals such as communion, his benediction, and departing congregants in ways that fostered church connectivity. He particularly shined as a spiritual leader during difficult times.

Cody invested in the growth of the congregation – attracting young people and enhancing previously underrepresented demographics in a way that integrated and brought the church closer together with balance, vibrancy, and intergenerational fellowship. He fostered the church's strong social justice ministries and helped us realize, understand, and integrate the spiritual side to our activism - we are a spiritual community, a community of faith, biblically-based and knowledgeable, *and* can use sacred texts to respond to the world. His advocacy highlighted issues of prison reform, wrongful incarceration, mass incarceration, anti-racism, violence with the police, mass shootings, queer ministry + justice + visibility, and the 'more than human.' He also illuminated the benefits of and creative methods for engaging the transient community among us,

which the congregation has historically viewed as a challenge. He saw education, adult learning, and the music ministries as vital parts of a lively Christian community and invested in their growth.

Cody's involvement with the community stretched beyond the church walls. He used his larger ecumenical presence to represent our congregation and Baptists in various settings: as an author, MIT chaplain, professor, and valued member of the Harvard Chaplains and Harvard Square Ministers. He mentored six seminary students who each enriched the life of OCBC. He organized the congregation's presence at the annual Pride and BAGLY youth parades. He photographed and posted extensively, giving OCBC a broad presence on social media. He also installed signs on the lawn with socially just messaging and a cross honoring those killed in mass shootings, each of which served as powerful visual symbols of public witness to the community outside our walls.

Each pastor mentioned above brought unique gifts to the community. As OCBC starts a new chapter, we welcome a new pastor who can build on our current ministries and bring a fresh perspective to the church's vision.

Social Justice Activism

Since its earliest days of opposition to slavery, OCBC has been known for "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable," as often referenced by Rev. Ernst Klein. The church tends to interpret the gospel of Jesus as allegiance to a higher order than the state, or even "the Empire," whether it occurred in Roman times or in our contemporary United States, whenever government policies go against the basic precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. In a few cases, this view has resulted in [surveillance by the FBI](#) and possible break-ins by the government during our 1985 declarations of Sanctuary for "undocumented" Central American immigrants. These instances are a point of pride, not shame, for [many members of the congregation](#).

A pioneer among churches who are welcoming and affirming of the LGBTQIA+ community, OCBC helped co-found AWAB (Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists) in 1983. Many from OCBC were also active well before that in the precursor organizations within TABCOM and ABC. This stance was a continuation of a longstanding social justice legacy, which includes combating racism, protesting U.S. involvement in war, supporting the equality of women in the world and in worship services, giving energy to the sanctuary movement in the 1980s and immigrant rights today, and an active "green" conservation policy. Together, these legacies of resistance and activism function to give OCBC and its individual members an identity. There are references to this legacy in the paragraphs above on recent pastors, and below, but a few more details are noted here. All of these themes continue to this day, but the dates below are when they were an initial or primary focus.

Sections to follow:

1. Civil rights / Black Liberation
2. Anti-war and Peace
3. Feminism
4. Sanctuary for Central American Refugees
5. Welcome for Sexual Minorities and LGBTQIA+ Liberation

1. Civil Rights / Black Liberation

In the 1800s there were, of course, slaves in the north as well as the south, and at least one woman, Mary Walker, who was a fugitive slave, attended OCBC (with her employers) in 1854. In 1855, she was baptized in the church, and eventually brought some of her children north.

In the mid-1960s, a new group called F.I.R.E. (Freedom Is Required Or Else) led by Bill Everett, was established. This regional group worked “to relate the civil rights movement to Baptist Churches in Massachusetts” and served as an example of the leadership role the congregation was assuming in the area of civil rights. On June 16, 1968, the church voted unanimously to support the establishment of a \$50,000 Community Development Fund. The church agreed that the fund should be used for “black self determination” and that the board of trustees for this fund should have a majority of representatives from the black community “in order that no strings be attached to the use of the money.” In 1963, Ernie Klein went to the civil rights march in D.C., where parishioners Harvey Cox and Paul Chapman were sent to jail. During the heightened racial crisis from Birmingham to Boston, the arrests of OCBC members made the civil rights struggle personal for the congregation.

Fifty years later, an active Racial Justice Team, which grew out of a broad Social Justice Team and then an ad-hoc group, encourages the church’s transition from a “racial justice” oriented congregation to one which is actively anti-racist. OCBC is now networking with like-minded churches to support modern day opposition to “New Jim Crow,” working to erase prison inequity for people of color and protect minority voter registration in the face of a national backlash; to oppose white supremacy in its many forms, through conscientization, education, and training; to combat the colonialist legacies of eradication and displacement through support for immigrant communities coming to the US (Boston/Cambridge); turning a global eye toward the links between Christianity and multiform apartheid; redressing white Christian nationalism; and by addressing the need for abolition in realms such as prisons and policing.

2. Anti-war and Peace

In October 1969, OCBC offered sanctuary to Eric Mann, “the leader of the Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).” With support from the congregation, the pastor “met the police at the door and asked them not to make arrests inside the church.” The police complied, and Eric Mann explained his actions and why he felt compelled to oppose the war in Vietnam in the safety of OCBC’s sanctuary. After the press conference, Mann was arrested outside without

incident.

In April 1970, there was a violent anti-war riot in Harvard Square. OCBC served as a temporary first aid station and sanctuary. Pauline Swift stood at the door to protect wounded protestors and keep police from entering during anti-war riots in Harvard Square. The police respected the church's "sanctuary" status and the protestors were treated and sent to the hospital if needed. At least 120 people were treated for injuries at Stillman Infirmary and inside OCBC. The Associated Press reported that a total of 300 people had been injured.

The arrests of church members Jim Wallace and Paul Chapman at a Washington, D.C. anti-war demonstration again brought the war home. (Wallace was later honored by the White House for housing equality work, but could not enter due to this old arrest!)

3. Feminism

In the early 1970s, a group of women who called themselves Sojourners began to meet in the church's tower room. The feminist movement was challenging ideas of male leadership and gender-based assumptions, and this group focused on a radical reimagining of faith, implementing gender equality in the church and the language of worship and welcoming sexual minorities. The women's and lesbian liberation movements overlapped in many ways, and more women in the church were coming out as lesbians. By their very presence they questioned traditional practices and interpretations of God and of scripture. Liturgical dance and theater, such as 1974's "Witch, Virgin, Whore" production, challenged the congregation to see the oppressive limitations of these three roles for women and went on to re-invent the powerful and healing aspects of each one. This re-imagining was not just for women; it would free men to also benefit from the limits of their former roles. At least one woman, Betsy Sowers, was inspired to enter the ministry at this time, and several women ministers – settled, interim, and part time – have carried it on. The language of worship itself was transformed to make it more inclusive of a female and/or gender neutral deity.

4. Sanctuary for Central American Refugees

On Dec. 4, 1984 OCBC became host to "Estela Ramirez," an El Salvadoran trade unionist who was arrested and tortured on three separate occasions between 1981 and 1984 for her work. "Estela" took up residence in OCBC's chapel for two weeks, where she was constantly surrounded by at least two "vigiling" members from OCBC who were trained in how to handle the very real threat of INS action. Following this symbolic period of sanctuary within the physical walls of OCBC, "Estela" moved into the community and began the work she had come to do – giving testimony of her experience in El Salvador. Before and after this event, OCBC has supported immigrants and refugees, "undocumented" or not, including a pro-democracy family from Chile, who had to flee after the military coup there. OCBC drew strength and guidance from biblical tradition and in our social justice activism often referenced Deuteronomy 19:10, Matthew 22:37-40, and I John 4:18-21.

More recently, OCBC was part of a religious coalition that supported an undocumented mother and her two young daughters through two years of Sanctuary in another Harvard Square church. Today she has her green card, is employed and living independently with her family.

In November 2023, a young Haitian couple began attending services at OCBC. We soon learned that they were here under the Biden Administration's Humanitarian Parole Program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans. Their host family was no longer able to support them. They were without adequate housing, winter clothes, or adequate food. A church member invited them into her home and hosted three other family members who arrived on Christmas Eve. Through the support of this church member, a small volunteer committee, and generous donations of money and clothing, the family is thriving and contributing to the life of OCBC, including two of the family who sing in the church choir.

5. Welcome for Sexual Minorities and LGBTQIA+ Liberation

OCBC's decision to become actively involved in LGBTQIA+ inclusion began in the 1980s when the congregation's pastor, Monica Styron, started a gay and lesbian support group. This support group ministered to people, who, in the words of one congregant, "had been chewed up pretty bad by their home congregation," and sought to provide a safe space for LGBTQIA+ individuals to work out their sexuality and to reconcile their sexuality with their faith. Then, in 1983, Styron approached church member Grace Peters about producing a "welcoming and affirming" statement, which was voted by the congregation. Adopting this status in 1983, years before most of the progressive congregations in Harvard Square, meant that OCBC was placing itself in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, the congregation's leadership within ABCConcerned meant that OCBC ran the very real risk of having its standing in the ABC (USA) revoked. Now AWAB (Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists) has 174 member congregations/organizations. We continue to urge the American Baptist denomination to go on record as accepting LGBTQIA+ people.

Our Church Building

OCBC was established on August 20, 1844. The congregation raised a beautiful Greek Revival meetinghouse in 1845 on the Small Common in the Village of Old Cambridge. By 1866, the congregation had outgrown this building, so they sold it to a Congregational church, which moved it by oxen down Massachusetts Avenue to Porter Square. OCBC then sold the land to Harvard University and bought the present site in Quincy Square. Between 1867 and 1870 the congregation raised the present Gothic Revival church, designed by Alexander Rice Esty, which was dedicated in September 1870. In 1889, a fire engulfed the church and gutted the Massachusetts Avenue end of the building. The congregation undertook repairs that followed designs by Clarence Blackall, an architect famous for many of Boston's historic theaters. A new window from Louis Comfort Tiffany, a rare example of early Tiffany ecclesiastical glass, replaced the large Parish Hall window.

The Twentieth Century saw a number of changes to the interior of the church. The Memorial Prayer Chapel was created with windows that were dedicated to the memory of members killed in the Second World War, including the two sons of the Rev. Samuel Miller, who was OCBC's longest-serving former pastor from 1935-58, after which he became the Dean of Harvard Divinity School. In 1982, the National Register of Historic Places added the church building to its esteemed list. The congregation excavated the basement in the mid-1980s to make space for nonprofit groups that shared their desires for peace, justice, and a better world. As a result of rental income, capital campaigns that began in 1994, and preservation grants from the city and state, the congregation was able to stabilize the tower, repoint much of the masonry, restore most of the stained-glass windows, and replace the roof. In 2000, the church entered into a long-term lease with the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre, which shares space on all three floors of the building for classes, performances, and offices. The church has also considerably updated the building to better conserve energy and water for which OCBC received a 2006 Go Green award from the City of Cambridge.

Section 4: Church Life Today

Worship Life

Worship is the major focus of life together in the church; it gathers the people of God together regularly. Services are planned by the Senior Minister in collaboration with the Minister of Music and the Spiritual Life Team. Every Sunday, OCBC has a liturgist share in leading worship, usually a layperson. That person leads the responsive call to worship and offers the prayers of the people, which are accompanied by Tibetan singing bowls most Sundays. Specific prayers are shared in the bulletin, which may be submitted on cards in the sanctuary or online. Currently, children attend the start of the service and leave with Sunday School teachers at the passing of the peace. Communion is served monthly, usually by the senior and associate ministers and/or a lay leader.

We expect our minister to keep current on biblical scholarship and the needs and issues in the congregation, community and world, in order to preach sermons that allow scripture and Baptist principles to help the congregation think critically and prayerfully and to respond with action as followers of Jesus. The Senior Minister will share the pulpit with the Associate Minister, lay preachers, student ministers, and occasional guest speakers.

Our current choir director and Minister of Music, Thomas Jones, has drawn in many new members and continues to engage the congregation through the choir and other musical experiences. We are blessed with a considerable amount of musical skill and experience within our congregation. Music is an important part of every service, with congregational singing, the choir during the academic year, and special music at other times. This may be provided by instrumentalists and/or vocal soloists, adults or children, from within our church community. We have special musical services on Christmas Eve and Easter with extra paid musicians and a larger choir. For more than

40 years, every Epiphany Sunday, congregant Doug Koch has been leading his annual Jazz Mass. In recent years, we have also enjoyed a partnership with the Crepusculum Choir, a student-led group from Berklee College of Music, which has led in worship several times.

Congregational Life

While Sunday gatherings for worship, fellowship, children's Sunday School, and adult educational forums are central to our congregation, there are many additional opportunities at other times for church members and attendees to get involved and participate closely with others in the life of the church. Most congregants serve on teams and committees, sing in the choir, and/or attend other church events.

Church teams (with direct representatives on the monthly deacons' council) include: Community Partnerships & Action, Hospitality, Congregational Care, Spiritual Life, Communication & Belonging, Racial Justice, Long-Range Planning & Building, Finance, Adult Education & Formation, and Children's Education & Formation. Current committees (which may meet seasonally or ad-hoc) include: Personnel, Nominating, Pastor-Parish Relations for Senior Minister, Pastor-Parish Relations for Associate Minister, Congregational Giving Committee, and Creation Justice Group.

There are occasional delightful age group potluck dinner gatherings for young, middle and older adults. We also have occasional intentional intergenerational dinners, often with a theme for discussion and sharing.

Twice each year, during Lent and Advent, weekly Morning Prayer Services are held in our Chapel and online. Companionship Circles form to help support our OCBC ministerial interns from Harvard Divinity School as they go through the ordination process.

Volunteers also maintain our beautiful award-winning church gardens and curate and publish a weekly listing of social justice opportunities with actions that can be taken for solidarity, advocacy and change. It is not unusual for book groups or ad-hoc study and spiritual growth groups to form for several sessions in online meetings, and we sometimes have poetry readings from several poets in the congregation.

Finally, as part of our building ministry, we lease space to the Jose Mateo Ballet Theater and a number of smaller tenants who address the needs of the homeless, immigrants, etc. This enables us to support the arts and social justice issues through our building, while also helping us cover the costs of ongoing restoration and capital improvements, including greening our building. Because of the lease to the ballet, church use of the sanctuary and parish hall on weekdays, Saturdays, and on Sunday afternoons must be carefully planned and scheduled far in advance. The church always has full use, at any time, of our chapel, Christian education rooms, church offices, archives and any vacant spaces not rented at the time.

Current Ministers

The Rev. Naro Pongen - Temjennaro Pongen is from Nagaland, India. She was born and raised in a Baptist family together with five older siblings. Growing up, Naro was very active in youth ministry and she loves music. She finished her Bachelor of Arts from Patkai Christian College in 2007, after which she went on to pursue the Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology at Clark Theological College and Union Theological College respectively. Naro graduated with the Master of Arts in Feminist Liberation Theologies from Episcopal Divinity School in May 2017. Naro was ordained at OCBC in December 2023. At OCBC, Naro serves as Associate Minister, cultivating the spiritual life of the congregation alongside the pastor and laity, giving specific attention to the pastoral care and spiritual development of OCBC's children and their families.

Thomas Jones - As our Minister of Music, Tom has overseen the music program since the fall of 2002, and has turned an all-volunteer choir into a professional-sounding chorus, working first with organist/pianist Kathy Maskell (sadly now deceased) and currently with Beth Barefoot. An internationally known baritone singer for over three decades and an adjunct vocal instructor at Harvard University for 24 years, he brings considerable musical and pedagogical skills to his work as a choir director. For members of the choir, it is his patience, his caring prayers for each person, and his passion for excellence in music that has made the choir a great blessing. Even so, an oft-heard phrase is: "It's a worship service, not a performance." He produces annual special Christmas Eve (with chamber orchestra) and Easter (with brass ensemble) services and previously organized a choir CD named *Total Praise*.

The Rev. Betsy Sowers - Betsy represents OCBC outside the church through involvement in both faith-based and secular climate justice organizations and actions. She also helps the congregation connect the dots between Earth justice and the other justice concerns that are intimately intertwined with it, especially racial, economic, gender, and immigration/refugee justice, and the possibility of just peace and redemptive community in a climate-stressed world. Betsy came to her lifelong call to 'peace and justice' ministry via her first post-college job as a flight attendant for Pan American World Airways, which gave her the gift of global awareness and brought her to Cambridge, where she found OCBC, a congregation that confirmed and encouraged her call. After earning an MSW at Boston College Graduate School of Social Work, and the Masters of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, she was called as a staff person, and later director in the Department of Church and Society of The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts, serving as educator and advocate on peace and justice matters to Baptist churches in the Commonwealth. A clear call out of retirement to climate justice service has both surprised and energized her for another chapter of activist ministry.

The Rev. Rick Mixon - Rev. Dr. Randle (Rick) Mixon began serving as Interim Senior Minister of Old Cambridge Baptist Church on August 1st, 2023. Rick is an ordained American Baptist minister

with over 50 years of experience in pastoral ministry, church leadership, and social justice advocacy. He served as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Palo Alto, California from 2006-2020 and has served as interim minister for three congregations over his career – Dolores Street Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA; First Baptist (now United) Church of Granville, OH; and Fairview Community Church, Costa Mesa, CA. He is a long time member of Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, Oakland, CA, the church that ordained him in 1996 as the first openly LGBTQIA+ Baptist to be ordained.

He has also been involved in various regional and national organizations, such as the Alliance of Baptists, the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, the American Baptist Minister's Council, and the Santa Clara County Council of Christian Churches. Currently he serves as Affiliate Professor of Pastoral Care at Berkeley School of Theology in Berkeley, CA, and emeritus board member of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists.

Rick brings to Old Cambridge Baptist Church a passion for preaching the gospel of love, grace, and liberation, a commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive community of faith, and a vision for engaging in prophetic witness and service in the world.

Lay Ministry

The ministry of the laity has been a key component at OCBC, especially since the pastorate of Ernst Klein. Defining the relative responsibilities and authority of the laity, pastor, and other staff has been an area of conflict at times, but OCBC has worked to create greater clarity around the collaborative leadership the congregation is seeking. Over the past ten years, systems to support this work have been put into place, including our organizational structure, Pastor-Parish Relations committees, and a Personnel committee which continues to refine personnel policies and practices. As shown in the organizational chart (attached in an appendix), we have a robust committee structure with lay leadership throughout, including on Spiritual Life. Through its fifty-year dedication to lay ministry, OCBC has continuously provided members the opportunity to be active co-leaders in the church's Sunday services. The congregation is looking for a dynamic relationship with its pastor, with collaborative leadership shared in mutual trust. The pastor's role is to be a spiritual coach, who not only helps us to deepen our faith, but to grow as lay leaders and as a prophetic community with mutual trust, respect, and collective energy for mission.

Among the "laity" of OCBC are a number of ordained ministers and others who have attended divinity school or otherwise received spiritual training, including ministers-in-training, who are nurtured by the pastor and congregation. OCBC has facilitated the development of at least thirteen ordained ministers over the last three decades. This adds to the rich spiritual life of the community and sometimes has led to some friction when disagreements arise.

How We Work Together

At OCBC, we try to be intentional about the ways we organize ourselves and work together. We recognize that structures and boundaries are important to building a healthy and sustainable congregation; and we also need to bring our whole selves and space for God to be able to live into our vision of building a beloved community. To accomplish this, we read collectively from our behavioral covenant (see appendix for the full text) at the beginning of major meetings; we seek to face our current and future challenges from a place of hope and care, rather than anxiety; our deacons and congregational meetings follow Robert's Rules of Order.

We prefer a collegial organizational model to a hierarchical one. We find it important to be as clear as possible in job descriptions regarding responsibilities, reporting structures and any supervisory roles. We have explored the ways patterns of behavior can recur in family systems like churches, and have become more aware of the importance of transparency, mutual accountability, and examining what is going on in the whole body, not only one or two individuals, when there is conflict.

We also recognize the particular challenges that a minister can face in relationships with church members, where conflicts can be particularly fraught and often inevitable in the course of making decisions and moving the church forward. Our Pastor-Parish Relations Committee serves an important role to work with the pastor in connecting with the members and staff, supporting those healthy relationships. We have also supported our pastor in finding meaningful mentoring and support outside the congregation to help manage those relationships. Our Personnel Committee also serves an important role to oversee performance review processes.

Building and Building Ministry

Besides housing our administrative offices, the church basement is filled with social justice groups who rent office and meeting space at below market rates, many of which have received organizational guidance and mentoring over the years from OCBC members. Today these include Moving Up (Solutions at Work), Spare Change News, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Adbar Ethiopian Women's Alliance. In past years, they served Women for Women in Lebanon, the Middle East Center, the Cambridge Tenants Union, Big Brother Association, and several Central American support organizations. "If this building could talk," it would tell stories of many community events and benefits over the years: Composers in Red Sneakers and Stan Strickland, Martin Luther King, Jr. concerts, Native American Pow Wows, Noam Chomsky lectures, crafts fairs, gay dances, bisexual conferences, 12 Step meetings, and more. Jose Mateo Dance Theater's annual "Dance for World Community" often involves church members, who host a booth and welcome people to the lovely garden and grounds.

OCBC was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, and has received numerous

grants from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Cambridge Historical Commission. These grants have enabled us to preserve our Tiffany window, repair our slate roof, waterproof the north and south walls of the church and repair our bell tower louvers. Presently we are working with Cambridge Historical Commission to repair exterior steps and replace exterior doors with historic replicas. Through an anonymous and generous gift, OCBC was able to replace its antiquated oil-fired steam heat system with a highly efficient gas-fired hydronic system. Although air and ground source heat pumps were not feasible when we replaced the heating system, we continue to explore ways to reduce or eliminate the use of fossil fuels. The anonymous gift also made possible the restoration of all operable windows, also part of historic preservation. In 2006, OCBC constructed a rainwater retention system under the parking lot to divert rainwater from the roof. This is now the source for flushing toilets and our irrigation system. Surrounding all four sides of our building are beautiful gardens, filled with native plants and lovingly tended by volunteers Grace Peters and Sue Schroen.

Church Celebrations and Events

OCBC is a welcoming and a sending church. We recognize that our proximity to many colleges and universities means that individuals and families will be with us for a while and then move on. Our “sending” ritual involves surrounding the individual(s), with touch or a raised hand and singing, “Long Time Sun.”

In the fall, we welcome congregants back from vacation, as well as new students and others who have moved to town, with a homecoming picnic. Food is an important element of our hospitality. In November, we look forward to an “Ingathering Sunday” when we gather pledges for the coming year during the service and then offer thanksgiving with an elaborate potluck meal following the service.

In addition to celebrating our graduates, OCBC has been privileged to ordain many divinity students as they enter the ministry.

In recent years, we have looked forward to an annual special musical service led by the extraordinary Crepusculum Choir of Berklee School of Music. We also celebrate our “in house” musicians whose gifts include voice, cello, piano, organ, violin, flute, viola, Tibetan bowls, and more.

Financial Summary

OCBC’s financial position is complex: We have income from a variety of sources and a good amount of funds on hand, but our position often feels slightly precarious with expenses outpacing income.

More of our annual income comes from rental than from the congregation, with the largest proportion of that coming from the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre (JBMT), through a long-term lease of

our church building created in 2000. JMBT rent provides approximately \$168,000 of our annual income. An additional \$175,000+ comes from renting other offices in the building as well as parking spaces in our parking lot. In 2023, we received \$206,000 in annual donations from the congregation. The 2023 expense budget was \$667,107 and actual expenditures were \$626,623, aligned with income and including transfers from some gifts received in the past few years through special fundraising efforts for specific purposes.

OCBC does not have an endowment in the strict sense, but the church does have a substantial liquid asset base that includes \$409,337 in current assets and \$197,781 in investments as of December 31, 2023.

Section 5: What We Believe

OCBC members hold a wide variety of theological beliefs, from fairly orthodox Trinitarian, to liberation/feminist/Queer/decolonial theologies, to questioning seekers. We come from Christian backgrounds such as Southern Baptists (who bring their biblical literacy and love of great hymns, while having moved to other places theologically), other evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and the Society of Friends. While we are clear in our identity as a Christian community, we have a pluralistic and, uniquely, interfaith respect for fellow seekers. We engage in dialogue with those of other faiths and welcome them to worship with us in ways that seem best fit. We have also integrated Tibetan Singing Bowls from the Buddhist tradition when we pray together, to assist us in centering into the presence of the Holy Spirit.

God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit

Our strongest theological consensus as it regards the Triunity of God would likely be on the Holy Spirit, God present in our midst, whose presence members express they regularly feel in worship, congregational activities, and our mission/social justice outreach. OCBC members have different beliefs about what it means to say, “Jesus is Christ,” but share in the experience of grace, the understanding of Christ as Liberator, whether from personal sin as a detriment to relationship with God, and/or suffering in history and society (structural sin), such as that inflicted by white supremacy, heterosexism, ableism, colonialism, capitalism, environmental degradation, etc. Just as Jesus is understood as anointed by God, we understand ourselves to be anointed to follow Jesus in the way of love, compassion, and justice, which may lead to the cross, but always to resurrection (authentic/eternal life).

God is regularly acknowledged in worship as Creator, Source and Center of Being, both individually and universally, Eternal Love, Holy One, and other metaphors that express aspects of the Divine without putting God into a human-made box. Our God language intentionally uses multiple genders in reference to God, or sometimes none at all in metaphors beyond gender and human

imagery, to affirm our belief that all human beings are made in the image of God, regardless of binarisms of gender identity imposed *ex post facto* on Christian theology (“man and woman” in Genesis is a merism, which is inclusive of all that falls between, e.g., “I looked high and low”), and that God likewise is infinitely beyond anthropomorphic descriptions.

Again, people have myriad understandings and experiences of God, but there is consensus leaning toward the Mystery of God, and God’s radically inclusive, transformative love, rather than doctrinal purity.

The Bible and its Use

While the congregation is strongly opposed to biblical fundamentalism (literalism) and its use to advance legalistic orthodoxy or right-wing political causes, most members desire and thrive on consistent biblical preaching and teaching that creatively, constructively, and often critically engages scripture. That is not to say preaching at OCBC is wholly or thus even critically approbative of the bible; many preachers and sermons at OCBC level deconstructive and radical readings of texts as well. Most attendees/congregants, including a significant number who are seminary graduates or students, appreciate and expect insightful exegesis that makes the biblical stories come alive with relevance for our time and our lives. People are not all in the same place as to what it means to say that the bible is “divinely inspired,” or the relative roles of God and humans in creating it, but all respect it as a source of wisdom, guidance, and ancient, yet eternal stories of redemptive grace, as well as challenge to and subversion/conversion of the principalities and powers, and individual lives.

Believers’ Baptism and Lord’s Supper

While believers’ baptism is affirmed and practiced at OCBC, we recognize the baptism received in other communions and accept all people for membership and at the Communion table, regardless of their baptism. Whether one has been baptized or not is no barrier for membership or full participation in the Lord’s Table; we welcome all.

Our members hold a variety of theological beliefs about the Lord’s Supper, but a shared understanding of the presence of Christ in our midst, being lifted into the presence of the Holy, and of becoming/affirming one body in Christ as we share the meal together. Since the Lord’s Supper belongs to Christ, all are welcome to the table with no exceptions.

The Table is also often a site at which we consider the goodness and provision of God as we come to eat and drink together, even as we consider the structures of sin in this world that prevent others from receiving their daily bread. We therefore also reflect, in song, “When Bread is On Every Table,” sung as we come to the Table, on an eschatological yet also earthly future in which the Table will be set by God and attended by all who would commune with God.

The purpose, place and mission of the church in today's society

Through a congregational day retreat and house meetings, it was discerned that the current purpose of our church is both ministry to its members *and* to equip its members for ministry and service to the world (moving from privilege to responsibility). The goals of our ministry in the world are determined by the questions, "Where in the world is God already active and how may we join God in this work?" and, "Where in the world is Christ being crucified and how might we tend to the suffering Christ with compassion, comfort, and mercy as we seek a just end to such suffering?" (See also, our Church Covenant and Mission Statement in the appendix.)

Baptists' Four Freedoms

While not everyone comes from a Baptist background or is fluent in these very Baptist terms, Soul Liberty, Autonomy of the Local Congregation, Priesthood of Believers, and Biblical Interpretation are strongly affirmed and practiced in congregational life. Because some folks at OCBC fled from more authoritarian Baptist backgrounds, and others come from non-Baptist backgrounds, some carry the baggage of suspicion when it comes to things Baptist beyond the doors of OCBC.

Associational Principle and Support of American Baptist Churches USA

These are affirmed, but greater participation in the life of the Samuel Stillman Association, TABCOM, and ABC-USA is a growth area for OCBC. Our current involvement is primarily through education about and giving to ABC and TABCOM offerings. OCBC also holds membership in the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, and Alliance of Baptists.

Relationship to Ecumenical and Interfaith Witness

Most of our ecumenical and interfaith witness has been through joint social action ministries with other local churches, especially ministries with the homeless and hungry, and with faith-based justice ministries, such as Project Manna, Harvard Square Sanctuary Coalition, and an emerging racial justice ministry. OCBC also makes contributions to a number of other faith-based peace and justice groups through monthly mission offerings and our benevolence (mission) budget.

Section 6: How Others See Us

To gain perspectives on OCBC's theological and social justice ministries from the broader community, we interviewed several people who know OCBC well. They include an associate dean of Harvard Divinity School, a current tenant of our building, one of our building staff, a neighboring pastor, and a former member. We asked them to comment on the strengths and opportunities OCBC offers and what additional areas we can explore.

The consensus from the interviews underscored OCBC as a congregation with outstanding intellectual curiosity and a strong foundation in social activism. A former congregant described OCBC as an “ever-evolving dynamic creature full of vibrancy and warmth.” OCBC is deeply rooted in “caring for each other and the world with dedicated service and advocacy ministries.” OCBC is regarded as a “longstanding thought leader in social justice with strong presence in many protests, marches, and city policy advocacies.” Another person we interviewed described the core of the OCBC congregation as “very progressive and cutting-edge in social justice.” OCBC is recognized for its work on civil rights and providing “sanctuary for the struggling and underprivileged people”.

OCBC’s current work helping a Haitian immigrant family to build their spiritual and civic life within the community is a good example of the church’s ability to “engage from a grounded perspective” and offer radical hospitality to people from different backgrounds, as noted in a reflection provided by a former congregant. She holds OCBC in high regard and sees us as potential collaborators and thought partners in the work of reparations and reconciliation from a theological perspective.

OCBC is “intentional and relational” with the process of how its committees operate. This view was echoed by several former congregants. One commented favorably on her leadership retreat experience and was impressed by the “thoughtfulness and richness of life within the congregation” and how it is “accessible and easy for anyone to come in and get involved.” Our building manager remembers his first encounter with OCBC many years ago and compliments “how welcoming the community is” and that “everyone is respected regardless of their religious background.”

Our former pastor Rev. Cody Sanders brought “great humility and gifts to the Harvard chaplain leadership,” and was always a great “listener, interested to talk to and get to know every member of the congregation.” Another interviewee sees OCBC as an anchor in Harvard Square. The architecture of the building connects the earth to heaven, even for people who do not step inside the church.

We talked to one local pastor because of the long association between our churches with shared congregants and social justice missions. He challenged OCBC to build on its rich legacy, and bring theological leadership, congregational conscience and community leadership together to the work of social justice. He reminded us it is a big task and many pieces need to come together, so it will require professional maturity to “scale effort on different pieces.” He read to us this quote from Thomas Merton’s book *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: *activism and overwork*. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to

violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

This local pastor sees OCBC as “beautifully balanced between spirituality and social justice practice,” and has faith in its pastors and congregants to “connect the head and the heart; thinking and spirituality” to serving its ministries.

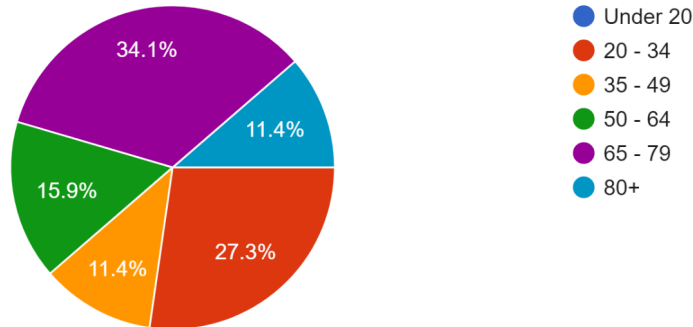
Appendices

Demographic Information

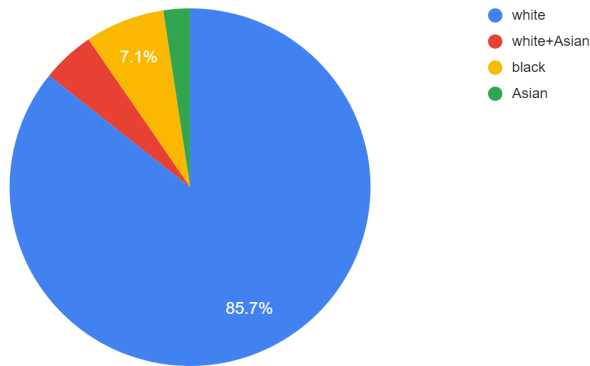
Note: This demographic data was taken via a congregational survey in the spring of 2024. Forty-four members and attendees of Old Cambridge Baptist Church responded to the survey.

What is your age?

44 responses

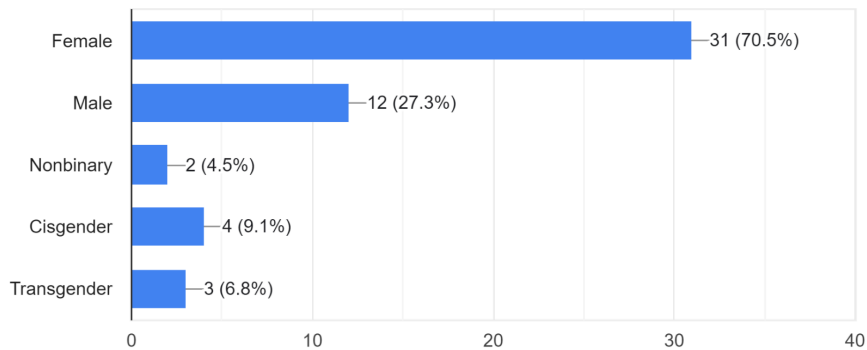


What is your race/ethnicity?

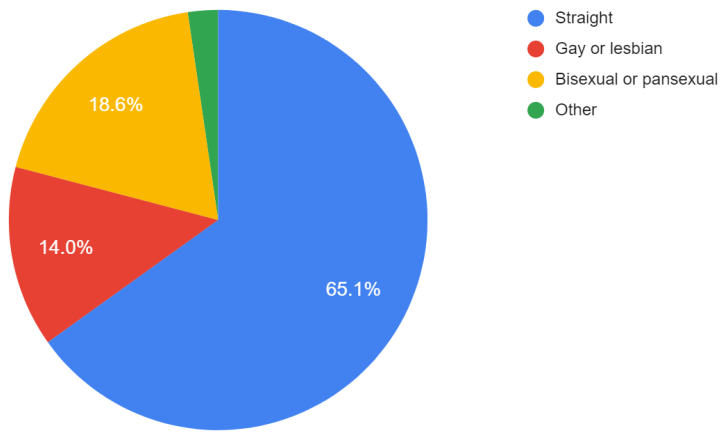


What is your gender identity? (select all that apply)

44 responses

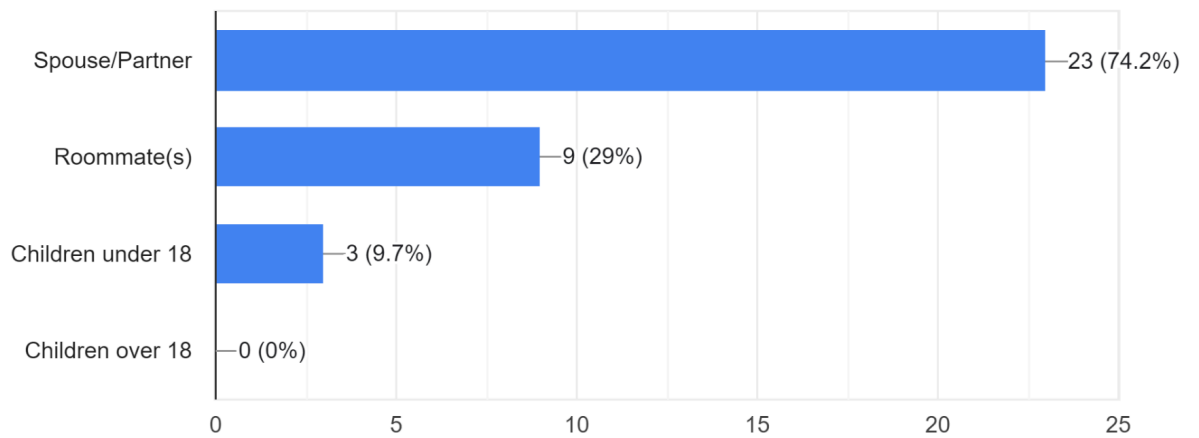


What is your sexual orientation?



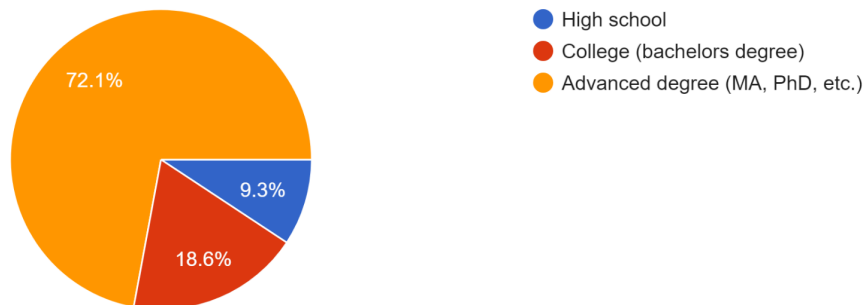
Who else is in your household?

31 responses



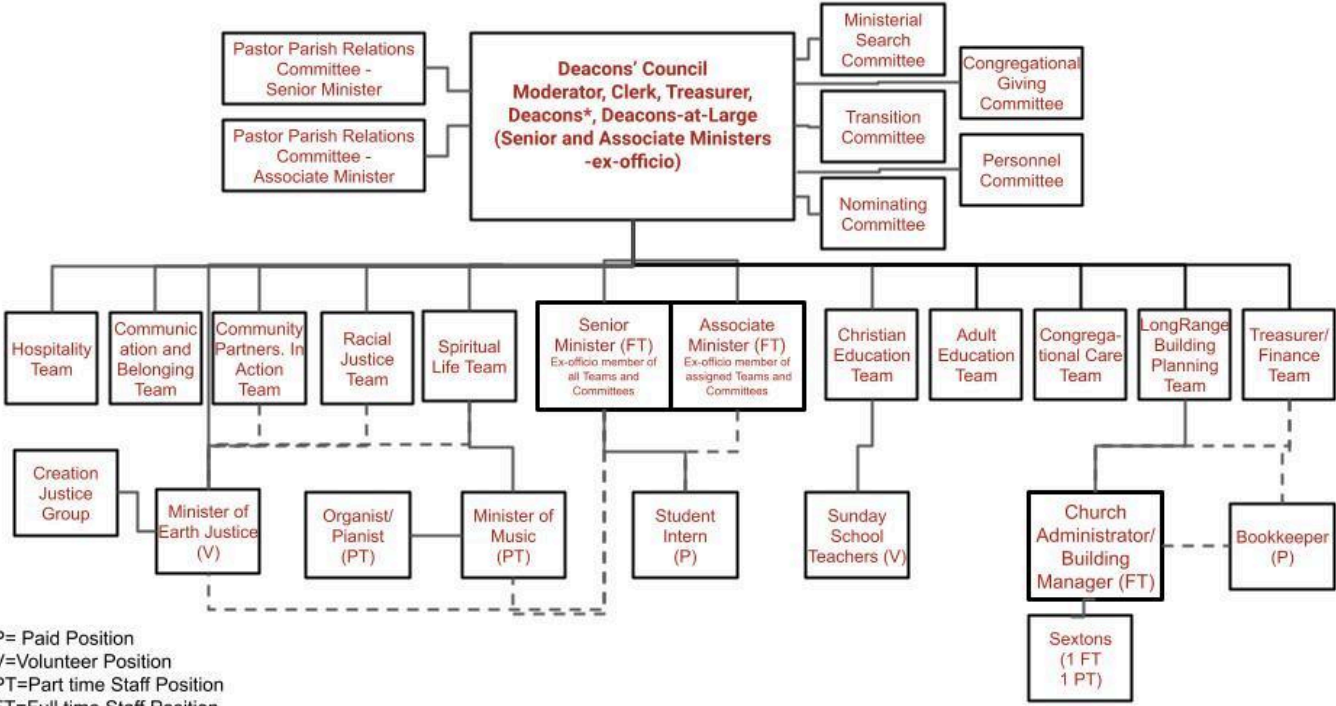
What is the highest level of education you have completed?

43 responses



Organizational Chart

Old Cambridge Baptist Church Leadership Organizational Chart June 2024



P= Paid Position
V=Volunteer Position
PT=Part time Staff Position
FT=Full time Staff Position

Solid Line= staff, team, or committee reports to indicated connection
Dotted line= staff collaborates and works with, but does not report to, indicated connection

*Teams have a Deacon on the Council, Committees and Groups do not.

Covenant of Old Cambridge Baptist Church

Gathered as people of God
who would live the faith we profess,
we covenant:

To become a community
enabling each other to realize the new life
God intends for all people,
and expressing the power of God to unite people
across all social and religious barriers;

To worship together praising God
and celebrating God's forgiveness and love,
which sustain us in God's service;

To equip ourselves and our children for mission,
bringing together Biblical insights
and the realities of the contemporary world
through a rhythm of study and action;

To apply responsibly our abilities and resources
within society and the church,
living in the tension between individual convictions
and the discipline of this community;

To go into every area of the world's life,
there to enter into the work of God.

Behavioral Covenant

Our promises to each other for how we will interact to create a safe community

- ❖ We will make room for God in our discussions, listening to God as we listen to each other and praying for God's guidance and grace.
- ❖ We will seek to build each other up and will do this by communicating clearly, completely and with humility; listening respectfully; considering thoughtfully; making space for everyone to be heard; and not interrupting others nor cutting them off while talking.
- ❖ We will respect and honor pastoral, lay and committee leadership and their ministries.
- ❖ We will only speak for ourselves and not claim to speak for others, which runs the risk of misrepresenting them. We can do this by making "I" statements, such as "I believe..." or "I feel..."
- ❖ We will seek to discover what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for us personally, or for some small group in the church.
- ❖ We accept disagreement, conflict and constructive evaluation and related change as normal and natural.
- ❖ We will be caring of each other by not gossiping, spreading rumors, untruths or half-truths, and will be honest with each other, speaking the truth in love directly to one another.
- ❖ When we are part of a conversation that is confidential, we do not share it with others outside the group.

These Covenants are:

- Promises, not rules
- Descriptions of behavior, not changes of personality
- Integral to our Christian daily spiritual practice
- Modeled by us in church, home, workplace and community
- Reviewed regularly

These Covenants guide us in:

- Sharing information
- Setting priorities
- Making decisions
- Exercising leadership
- Addressing complaints
- Resolving conflict

Mission Statement

OCBC is a progressive, inclusive Christian community in the American Baptist tradition that seeks to offer God's radical hospitality to everyone, answering God's call to hold fast to love and justice for the earth and all its peoples, and welcoming all who are seekers. Through our common life of prayer, worship, spiritual development, and the arts, we strive to follow the example of Jesus and to work, through active nonviolence, for social, racial, economic and ecological justice, and for peace.

OCBC is a Welcoming and Affirming congregation (meaning we are fully inclusive and celebrate the lives of LGBTQIA+ people), and has been since 1983, when the community declared itself to be officially welcoming of gay and lesbian people, and began to work actively within the church and the world for the civil and ecclesiastical rights of all, regardless of sexual or affectional orientation. This commitment now includes bisexual and transgender persons. OCBC also has a history of promoting gender equality and of providing accessibility to persons of all abilities.

OCBC has a long history of welcoming people of all races and cultures. We are fully committed to racial equity, which demands the fair allocation of opportunities and resources in employment, housing, education, health care, and other areas. We are also committed to working to ensure that no racial group is disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards or the criminal justice system.