



FINDING FAITH,
FINDING MEANING.
TOGETHER.





Lead Pastor Bob Mitchell wants people to know that Lincoln Presbyterian Church is a warm and welcoming place, where people are free to explore their faith.

PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

A WARM WELCOME

Lincoln Presbyterian Church a great place to find belonging, explore faith

BY SHANNON SPRINGMEYER

When Bob Mitchell was 8 years old, he knew he wanted to be a minister. While other boys were kicking around soccer balls at recess, Bob was officiating mock weddings for his classmates. He's followed his calling to the ministry for the last 32 years and has been the lead pastor of Lincoln Presbyterian Church in Stockton for 22 of them.

"My whole life, all of my formal education and everything, has been toward the dream of serving Jesus as the pastor of the local church," Bob says. "And so I get to live a dream."

He loves living out his calling and the opportunity it affords him to support people in critical moments of their lives, whether times of crisis or celebration, and to help others satisfy their spiritual hunger.

"I love the idea of helping people take their next step toward God, wherever they are," Bob says. "That gives me a deep sense of fulfillment."

He says that Lincoln Presbyterian Church is a great place for those curious about Christianity or looking to deepen their relationship with God.

"We have been told by newcomers and new members that there is a sense of Jesus' presence, a richness, a warmth, and a feeling of belonging regarding the

fellowship of the church and the friendliness of the church, and there's a very non-judgmental atmosphere," Bob says.

"You are made to be a part of a family. You are made to connect."

BOB MITCHELL

LEAD PASTOR, LINCOLN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

He cites a recent email from a visitor, a self-described atheist, who nonetheless felt welcomed at Lincoln.

"There's a real comfort level for people who are exploring their faith," Bob says. "You don't have to nail down your beliefs before you come to Lincoln. We think that you can belong before you believe."

Perhaps thanks in part to the church's openness toward newcomers, Lincoln Presbyterian has enjoyed an influx of new members in recent years. The church leadership reflects the evolution of its membership, and

on Sundays you can see faces of those in their 20s leading worship alongside those in their 80s, and all ages between. Bob says the church's cultivation of young leaders is intentional, and is fueled in part by the church's new affiliation with ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, a denomination less than two years old.

"[ECO] is young, it's vibrant, it's leading, it's growing, it's entrepreneurial, it's very biblically grounded and historically grounded in the Christian faith, in the reformed tradition," Bob says. "Our affiliation with ECO has breathed a whole new sense of life into our congregation."

The church's alignment with ECO is a continuation of its gradual transition over the years from a traditional, mainline Presbyterian congregation to one that's more informal and authentic. The church is less concerned with denominational distinctions, Bob says, and focused on connecting with others who are just trying to make sense of it all. In the end, he says, that's the beauty of sharing your faith journey with others.

"You are made to be a part of a family. You are made to connect," Bob says. "We are hard-wired as human beings for connection with God and with other people."

LINCOLN AT A GLANCE

DO I HAVE TO BE PRESBYTERIAN TO ATTEND?

No! In fact, the majority of those who attend do not come from a Presbyterian background. People from many backgrounds find it easy to connect with others at Lincoln.

WILL I HAVE TO DRESS UP FOR CHURCH?

You'd be hard-pressed to find a suit and tie here. Dress comfortably, and be yourself. You'll fit right in.

WHAT ARE SUNDAY SERVICES LIKE?

Gone are the robes, organ and pulpit of yesterday. Lincoln takes a relaxed, informal approach that seeks to honor God authentically. Two services offer a choice in musical styles for worship — blended traditional and contemporary at 9 a.m., and all-contemporary at 10:45 a.m.

WILL MY KIDS BE BORED?

Kids of all ages have a special place at Lincoln. The nursery cares for the littlest ones, while Sunday school and student ministries offer kids and teens from preschool to high school a fun and engaging place of their own.

HOW CAN I MEET NEW PEOPLE?

It's easy to connect with others through small groups. Bible studies and special interest groups help you find partners for developing your faith.

I DON'T USUALLY GO TO CHURCH. WILL I STICK OUT?

You don't have to believe to belong at Lincoln, and those who are just curious about Christianity or looking for a home church are welcome. There's no pressure here.



"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

MATTHEW 22:37-39

A photograph of Norma Yamaguchi, a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a light blue cardigan over a dark top and a pearl necklace. She is standing in a church sanctuary, smiling at the camera. In the background, wooden pews, a large cross on the wall, and other church members are visible.

“Lincoln is just a supportive, special church, filled with people who try to meet others’ needs.”

NORMA YAMAGUCHI

Norma Yamaguchi has been part of a small group at Lincoln Presbyterian for more than 10 years. When Norma’s daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor, the group’s support helped the family cope.

PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

TOGETHER THROUGH THICK AND THIN

Church supports members in time of need

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Norma and Bob Yamaguchi have developed close friendships with fellow members of Lincoln Presbyterian Church. They didn’t realize just how close until a family tragedy spurred an amazing outpouring of support.

In 2005, the youngest of their three children, 24-year-old Jodie, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. The Yamaguchis and their sons — Jeff, who lives in New York, and Scott, in Southern California — were devastated. Over the next five years, the family endured trials and tribulations as Jodie battled her disease until succumbing in 2010.

The Yamaguchis belong to a Growth Group at church. Their group has been around for more than a decade, which is unusual at Lincoln Presbyterian, where groups typically re-form several times a year. Throughout the ordeal — their “journey,” as Norma puts it — the group made a huge difference in their lives.

“Lincoln is just a supportive, special

church,” Norma says, “filled with people who try to meet others’ needs. Our small group is really, really my second family. All our extended family is back in Illinois, so we really count on the people in our small group.”

Norma recalls a particular moment of solidarity. Jodie had left the teacher-training program at Humboldt State University, following surgery. When her doctor recommended she undergo brain radiation, specialists at UC San Francisco offered the specialized therapy she needed. That would entail daily treatments for six weeks, on an outpatient basis.

Jodie would have to travel at least three hours round-trip every day. Both parents worked — Bob as a commercial landscape contractor, Norma as a nurse — so driving Jodie presented a challenge.

Norma mentioned the predicament to their group. The response was overwhelming.

“The first member, Bob Ramirez, said, ‘I’ll take her one day a week,’” Norma says. “Then another member

said, ‘I’ll transport her one day.’”

The scene reminded Norma of the movie “Spartacus,” with friends stepping forward one by one.

“Pretty soon the whole small group was saying, ‘We can take her; we can share that with you.’ That’s the kind of support they lent Bob and I. Just amazing.”

Support took many forms. Group members would take Jodie to lunch. Several women brought her on a theater trip to San Francisco, for the musical “Wicked.” When Jodie needed surgery, one couple — Mark and Karen Gantt — met the Yamaguchis at UCSF, offering their company and prayers. The Gantts gave the family a framed portrait of Jodie; at Bob’s request, Mark spoke at Jodie’s memorial.

“Our group helped us get through,” Norma says, “with the fellowship and the strength that they gave us, the encouragement, the grief they felt. They were devastated when she passed away. For our small group, it was really personal.”

CONNECT AND GROW

Lincoln Presbyterian Church encourages members to connect through small groups known as **Growth Groups**.

Growth Groups typically run for **12 weeks**; participants then can join other groups. Several Growth Groups have remained intact for years, offering the opportunity to form lasting connections.

Some groups focus on Bible study, while others are “affinity groups” for members with **common interests**. New groups are constantly being offered.

Growth Group selections might include options such as the **Girlfriends’ Lunch Bunch**, **Knitting Group**, **Quilting Group** and **Christianity in the Movies**.

Around 200 church members participate in Growth Groups — roughly two-thirds of the adults at Sunday services.

Growth Groups are not mandatory, but encouraged. “Small group life is really a big part of the DNA of Lincoln,” says Matt Kirkland, pastor of spiritual formation. “You don’t just dip a piece of meat into the marinade and expect it to be full of flavor. It takes time for a marinade to be effective.”



A PLACE WHERE FAMILIES THRIVE

Lincoln programs for children teach, nurture and inspire

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Dan Cliburn sends his children, Ellie, 4, and Caleb, 7, to Sunday school at Lincoln Presbyterian to gain a strong foundation for life — and have fun.

PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL



“It gives them a place to belong, a place to learn.”

DAN CLIBURN

LINCOLN PRESBYTERIAN PARENT

When it comes to their three young children, Dan and Liz Cliburn have specific expectations of church programs.

“The desire for me is they would learn God’s word and learn to apply it to their lives, so when they reach places where they’re unsure what to do, or just need reassurance or guidance, they’ll always have that truth in their hearts and know Jesus is with them,” Liz says.

Dan additionally hopes they’ll “understand how to interact with other children, treat them politely and with respect, and also learn about Christ’s sacrifice for them and how to have a relationship with God.”

The Cliburns have found just what they seek at Lincoln Presbyterian Church. Their son Caleb, 7, and daughter Ellie, 4, attend Sunday school and the Wednesday night children’s program, called AWANA. Their youngest daughter Christianna, 2, goes to the church nursery during services.

Caleb and Ellie love their classes so much that they’ll beg their parents to attend both sessions Sunday morning.

As for the Wednesday program, which runs 6 to 7:30 p.m., “they get to stay up a little past their bedtime that night, so they like that.”

AWANA stands for Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed, which comes from II Timothy 2:15. Classes are divided into age groups: Cubbies for preschool, Sparkies for kindergarten through second grade, and TnT for kids in third through sixth grade. The children memorize Bible verses and also play games.

“I just get so amazed every Wednesday night to see how excited the kids get,” says Sandi Widmer, co-director of children’s ministries. “It puts me in tears when they come up and say, ‘Miss Sandi, Miss Sandi, I know this!’ They’re so excited to be learning.”

Liz says Caleb and Ellie “have a really good time going to [AWANA] — they love it. It’s a good, good program.”

Sunday school also is divided by grade level, from preschool through sixth grade.

The Cliburns have attended Lincoln since before Caleb was born. They didn’t choose the church specifically for the children’s programs, Liz says, “but we really like the programs. It turned out wonderfully.”

The church has a long history of investing in the education of young people. Lincoln Presbyterian was founded, in fact, first as a Sunday school serving families in the new Lincoln housing development in the 1950s. The church has since grown to encompass families and individuals from different generations and different areas of the local community, but has not lost sight of its goal of investing in children. Lead Pastor Bob Mitchell says the church dedicates a lot of resources into providing a strong foundation for children that will serve them throughout their lives, and is a great place for families to connect.

Dan and Liz would agree.

“I feel like [my children] are learning a lot. I’m sure the church has had a lot of impact,” Dan says. “I just think it’s great for kids to be involved. It gives them a place to belong, a place to learn, and I think kids need something like that in their lives.”

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND BEYOND

Lincoln Presbyterian Church is committed to investing in children for a better future. The church offers weekly programs for children in preschool through sixth grade, plus special events most every month.

Sunday school is offered during both Sunday church services, at 9 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

The AWANA youth program meets Wednesdays at 6 p.m. and incorporates games and activities with the learning of Scriptures. Sunday school and AWANA classes are split into age-appropriate groups.

Special events offer opportunities to connect with other families.

Offerings include bowling trips, Easter egg hunts, celebrations for Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, Vacation Bible School, Summer Saturdays in the Park, “Minute to Win It” family competitions, an autumn carnival, Christmas parties and a Christmas children’s musical.

“We want to provide a safe, loving, nurturing environment in which children can develop a lasting relationship with

Jesus,” says Sandi Widmer, co-director of children’s ministries.



GUIDANCE FOR GROWING AND GIVING BACK

Teen group offers fun, service, life lessons

BY CATHERINE BEEGHLY

High school senior Amanda Johnson has attended Lincoln Presbyterian youth groups since eighth grade. She says she's had life-changing experiences through the group's trips to Mexico and retreats.

PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

Not many 17-year-olds can build a house. But Amanda Johnson has helped build more than one, and gave them away, asking nothing in return.

She's one of Lincoln Presbyterian's youth group members, and a participant in the group's annual service mission to Mexico. Through Amor International, the teen group builds a home from start to finish for an impoverished Mexican family.

"We know when we go down there that God has some unique experience in store for us every time," she says. "We really have to rely on Him in order to finish the house. It would be impossible without His guidance."

Amanda began attending Lincoln Presbyterian's youth group when she was in eighth grade, after a friend invited her. Amanda says the life lessons she's learned guide her in making the right decisions.

"There are tons of pressures and temptations in high school that are really hard to overcome," she says. "Throughout my four years [at Lincoln], I have really come to know God, and have learned how to truly rely on him."

Though the youth group caters to young believers, there's nothing watered-down about their faith, Amanda suggests. A yearly Hume Lake camp helps teens focus on spiritual development.

"Hume Lake is an awesome

weekend, full of fun and Jesus," Amanda says. "You get to relish in God's creation, and really feel his presence. At Hume, the chapels are phenomenal, and you really come back home on a 'God high.'"

She describes the group's yearly house-boating retreats as "a fun way to bond with the other members of the youth group," while the annual trip to Mexico helps teens apply their faith through serving others.

"We really get the opportunity to be God's hands and feet, and show his love to others," Amanda says. "The leaders give great messages, and it is the most incredible thing to see lives changed — not only the lives of the families we help, but also our own lives. Mexico has to be my favorite trip because of the service emphasis, and time spent with a focus of loving others."

Amanda says the trips to Mexico help her and other teens broaden their understanding of others and gain perspective.

"So much more transformation happens when there is service outside of the church's area, and it's almost hard to explain it until you have experienced it," Amanda says. "We see the poverty these families live in, and through it all, they give God the glory. They don't have any possessions, yet they are filled with so much joy and have more than they could ever ask for. It's an honor to serve these people."

"It is the most incredible thing to see lives changed."

AMANDA JOHNSON

HELPING TEENS FLOURISH

Lincoln Presbyterian offers youth groups for teens in grades 7-12. The youth ministry's mission is to REACH students with the gospel message of Jesus, CONNECT them to a community of Christ-Followers, help them GROW in their faith, challenge them to SERVE others, and HONOR God in all they do.

The groups offer many activities to meet these goals:

- **Fellowship nights.** Offer an opportunity for students to invite friends. Sr. high meets at 6 p.m. Sundays, Jr. high on Wednesdays at 5:45 p.m.

- **Weekly Bible studies.** Cover subjects such as stewardship, temptation, purity and selected books of the Bible.

- **Partnering with parents.** Youth leaders send a monthly ParentLink email that includes resources and helps keep the conversation of faith alive at home.

- **Reach events.** A monthly opportunity for students to gather together in a fun environment and connect with each other.

- **Camps and retreats.** House-boating, Hume Lake camp, and more.

- **Service.** Annual trips to Mexico teach students the value of helping others.

To learn more, visit www.lpcstudents.org.

Keith and Kerry Braley “adopted” Bonnie Gu, a foreign exchange student studying at the University of the Pacific, offering her support and a sense of family. PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL



REACHING OUT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Friendship Families is just the tip of the iceberg for outreach and community service at Lincoln Presbyterian Church.

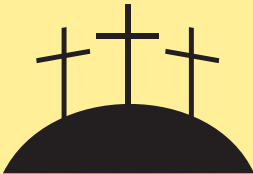
Twice a year, the church participates in public-service campaigns. The first is **The Season of Service**, which is after Easter and focuses on work within the church and community. The second, **Love Stockton**, takes place in the fall. It's part of a citywide campaign involving other churches.

Year-round, members serve and minister across Stockton and around the world.

Local endeavors include volunteering at the emergency food bank and Living Word Fellowship. The church supports a Vietnamese ministry in Stockton, a

children's ministry in a troubled area of south Stockton, and anger management and spiritual counseling at San Joaquin High Schools. Lincoln Presbyterian is also a supporter of the 75-year-old Gospel Rescue Mission in central Stockton, which feeds and clothes those in need, and has various programs for addiction, work training and housing. New efforts crop up all the time, spontaneously, as needs arise.

"We don't micromanage how people serve," explains Matt Kirkland, pastor of spiritual formation. "We want people to go out organically — where God has gifted them, we want them to serve."



HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Church members impact global residents of local community

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Bonnie Gu vividly remembers her first hours in America. It was the fall of 2012. She had spent 24 hours on a plane flying from her hometown of Shanghai, China, to California to become a graduate student at the University of the Pacific.

Bonnie reached her apartment in Stockton only to find it had just two twin beds to sleep six people. The refrigerator and cupboards were virtually bare. Without a car, she couldn't go to the market — even if she could have found a store that was still open at 3 a.m.

"All we had was Cup o'Noodles," she says.

Yet, when she looks back, she doesn't dwell on fatigue, hunger or frustration. Rather, she thinks glowingly of the following evening, at the home of Keith and Kerry Braley, who hosted a dinner for incoming Chinese students interested in becoming part of the Friendship Families program.

Bonnie got her first full meal in more than 30 hours. She met 40 other Chinese students and got her first introduction to life in the United States. Most enduringly, she forged a bond with the Braleys, one that continues even now that she's completed her MBA and returned to China.

"Without Keith and Kerry [Braley]," she says, "I don't think I would have had the chance to join a real American family."

A group from Lincoln Presbyterian Church launched Friendship Families in 2012 to offer an opportunity for Chinese students to experience life in an American home. Bonnie was among the first students to participate. Last fall, the program attracted 50 students and matched them with 12 families.

The goal was to get together with the students at least once a month. The Braleys included their students in many family activities, including dinners and game nights with their grandchildren.

"We have absolutely come to love these kids and are a big part of their lives."

KEITH BRALEY

FRIENDSHIP FAMILIES PARTICIPANT

"We started with three, but quickly grew to five, then six," Keith Braley says. Students attended their first Easter Service and learned the biblical meaning of Christmas, some of them spending Christmas Eve with the Braley family.

"Not only did they grow close to us, they grew very close to each other," Keith says. Keith also helped students take care of personal business when they were in China for summer vacation.

"We got into doing it for them," he says, "and we have absolutely come to love these kids and are a big part of their lives. It ended up being, from our perspective, a blessing for us.

"It's a wonderful thing to learn their culture. They're very cordial, open and transparent. They also have a tremendous sense of humor — we laugh all the time."

"I had a really great life in the U.S. because of Keith and Kerry," Bonnie says. "In China, because of the rules, we are the only kid in our family, so our parents really worry about us, especially when we are in the U.S and they are in China. But when they knew about Keith and Kerry, they said, 'OK, we won't worry about you.'"

REACHING AROUND THE GLOBE

Church members sponsor children abroad

BY CATHERINE BEEGHLY

This year, Emerson Arody de Leon Aju turned 18 and achieved his boyhood goal: graduating from the Compassion program where he lives in Guatemala.

Emerson might never have achieved his wish without Keith and Sandy Evans, his sponsors from Lincoln Presbyterian Church. The Evanses started sponsoring Emerson in 2008, when Emerson was just 11, through Compassion International.

"It is such a blessing to know that Emerson was able to achieve his dream of graduating," Keith says.

In 2009, the Evanses traveled to meet Emerson and his family in Cienaga Grande, San Lucia Utatlan. The sponsorship assisted Emerson in completing the Compassion project. It is an after-school program similar to a Boys & Girls Club or YMCA, where Emerson received additional schooling, trade skills and lessons about Jesus.

"What a thrill it was to meet Emerson, his parents, and brothers," Keith says. "We exchanged gifts, and I gave Emerson a soccer ball, paddle ball, pictures, drawing pads and pens, as he loves to draw. In fact, he is a very gifted artist."

The Evanses also visited Emerson's Compassion center, where the children performed a program that included dancing, singing and drama.

"Even though they spoke Spanish, and I don't know any Spanish, we still connected," Keith says. "By having us at his project, Emerson was 'big man on campus.' His self-esteem skyrocketed by all the attention he received from his fellow students."

Since 2008, members of Lincoln Presbyterian Church have sponsored more than 100 children through Compassion International, and more than a dozen sponsors have met their Compassion children.

Lincoln has sent its congregants to many far-reaching countries in the last 10 years, including Romania, Lithuania, Mexico and Africa.

Keith says it's important to the church to work outside its geographical area, quoting the Bible for support.

"Acts 1:8 states, '... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' For me personally, serving others where the culture is much poorer and less fortunate than us here in America — it keeps my situation in perspective. It also puts feet to my faith when I get out of my comfort zone to serve others."

The Evanses have attended Lincoln Presbyterian for more than 20 years, volunteering in many capacities. Sandy has been a pre-kindergarten teacher at the church for 10 years, while Keith has also helped build houses for families in Mexico with Amor Ministries.

"The families we built homes for were extremely poor," Keith says. "Many live in cars, or broken-down school buses. Homes were built by hand — meaning no power tools. At the end, we would hand the keys over to the family, and pray with them. It is always a very emotional time, as the families are so grateful."

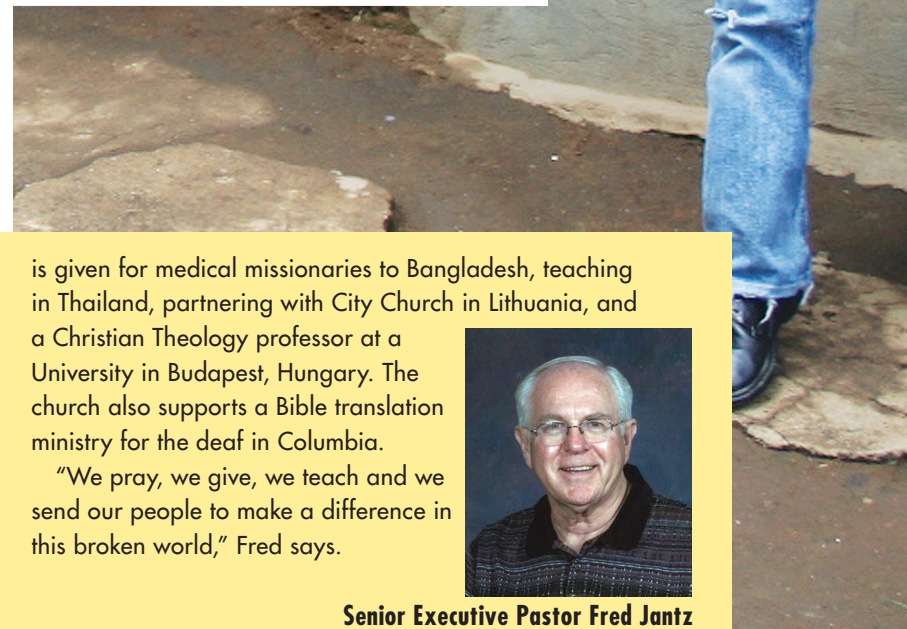
To learn more about Compassion International, visit www.compassion.com.

Keith Evans visited Emerson Arody de Leon in Guatemala in 2009, when Emerson was 11, bringing gifts of art supplies and a soccer ball. Keith and his wife, Sandy, sponsored Emerson through Compassion International for seven years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEITH EVANS

"It is such a blessing to know that Emerson was able to achieve his dream of graduating."

KEITH EVANS



IMPACTING THE WORLD

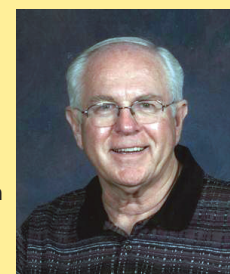
"Lincoln Presbyterian is a church that is connected to the world," says Fred Jantz, senior executive pastor.

Members have plenty of opportunities to get involved in giving back. The church mandates a minimum of 10 percent of its operating budget be spent supporting Christian efforts around the globe. The church also sends multiple teams of people throughout the year to Mexico, Africa, Lithuania, Romania and Guatemala.

In addition to building houses in Mexico, and sponsoring children in need through Compassion International, support

is given for medical missionaries to Bangladesh, teaching in Thailand, partnering with City Church in Lithuania, and a Christian Theology professor at a University in Budapest, Hungary. The church also supports a Bible translation ministry for the deaf in Columbia.

"We pray, we give, we teach and we send our people to make a difference in this broken world," Fred says.



Senior Executive Pastor Fred Jantz

JOIN THE FAMILY!

Discover what makes members of Lincoln Presbyterian Church so happy to be a part of its community. Whether you're looking for a church to call home or are just curious to find out more, you'll feel comfortable at Lincoln. People from every age, stage, and every point on their personal faith journey find authenticity and a sense of belonging at Lincoln. You don't have to believe before you belong.

See for yourself. Stop by this Sunday for fellowship, friendship and real support.

MINISTRY STAFF

Dr. Bob Mitchell
Pastor

Mathew Kirkland
Pastor of Spiritual Formation

Fred Jantz
Senior Executive Pastor

Dr. Al Van Selow
Administrative Pastor

Jonathan Knapp
Minister to Students

Zak Kear
Assistant Youth Director

Andrea Wynne
Director of Music Ministries/Pianist

Sandi Widmer
Interim Co-Director of Children's Ministries

Kristina Fontaine
Interim Co-Director of Children's Ministries

LINCOLN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

900 Douglas Road
Stockton, CA 95207

209-477-2783
www.lincolnpres.org

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES

9 A.M. Blended traditional and contemporary worship

10:45 A.M. Contemporary worship

**Sunday school offered
at both services!**



WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING

PHOTOS BY LOUISE MITCHELL



"There is a warm welcome for the new church-goer. Everyone accepts you when you come into Lincoln Presbyterian. There's no discrimination and there's something for everyone."

Jon Asis



"The people and the attitude of the church are following in Christ's example. The people are willing to share with you and open up."

Gabe Laguna



"Lincoln Presbyterian feels like home because it's family. The membership is faithful, friendly and giving, and we love the Lord."

Marie Todd



"It feels like home because everyone there has been welcoming and made my wife and daughter and I feel at home since the first time we visited the church."

James Lavender



"Lincoln kept me connected to God through good times and bad. I love my church!"

Bethany Heinrich