

Northbrae Community Church, Church Profile, 2020

Summary

Northbrae Community Church is located approximately two miles from the Berkeley campus of the University of California and the Graduate Theological Union. Established in 1914, it was the first church in North Berkeley and served as a community-gathering center, a function that continues to the present. Over more than 100 years, Northbrae has developed into an independent, nondenominational ecumenical church. Our 100-member congregation is composed primarily of educated, professional people from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, including but not limited to Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Eastern Orthodox, agnostic and atheist.

Our worship service follows a Protestant structure, with components revised to make them more theologically inclusive. Multi-religious symbols are present in our church.

Our landmark church buildings are situated on a beautifully landscaped property. The handsome A-frame chapel is set among ever-flowering gardens dominated by varieties of rhododendrons.

Church History

In 1914, the Presbytery of San Francisco established a church to serve the new Northbrae residential subdivision north of the UC campus. By 1920, its membership had expanded to include members of many denominations, and its name was changed to Northbrae Community Church. By 1942, the church had withdrawn from the Presbyterian Church.

Northbrae has been fortunate, in its 106 years, to have had several highly qualified ministers each of whom formulated and characterized the spirit of the church in response to unfolding cultural and theological changes. During a time of transition since the retirement of a popular minister, the church most recently has been led by a triumvirate of part-time ministers called from its membership.

As a result, over the past two years during a visioning process, the church has conducted several surveys, congregational meetings, and Council retreats, culminating in new Mission and Vision statements unanimously approved in February 2020.

The church has long welcomed a wide range of community gatherings. Building on this strong foundation, Northbrae is now committed to having its role as Community Center in visible partnership with the church. With this vision a goal, it sees its future leadership

team to include the minister, a community outreach coordinator, and the business administrator.

Theology and Worship

In the more than 100 years since Northbrae Community Church was founded, the congregation has shown a remarkable openness and reverence for the variety of religious thought, teachings, and inspirations in our world. One wall of our Chapel displays Torchbearers from around the world and through history, whose spiritual, intellectual, and social leadership have been a light for others to follow.

Our theology and worship services are deeply influenced by Protestant Christianity. Yet we worship without creeds, confessions, or limiting dogma, seeking instead to understand the messages at the heart of religion. Our order of service is as likely to contain readings from Native traditions or Buddhism as it is from the Gospels of Matthew or Mark. Many have called Northbrae a place of spiritual healing.

Beside Sunday services, Northbrae also has many groups that are spiritual but not religious, including a meditation group, spiritual writing group, study groups, and a world religions course.

Our chapel has been home to Jewish congregations, Buddhist practice groups, and interfaith families. We offer a gathering place for people of all kinds at important junctures in their lives.

Membership Summary

Northbrae Community Church's congregation is a community of seekers. Although the membership is predominately Caucasian, we come from a multitude of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and embrace our diversity. Our active members include those ranging from Gen Z and Millennials, to retired folks. While our Sunday services are attended mostly by older generations, our youth enjoy getting together informally, often at a distance during the academic year.

Organizational Structure

Northbrae is governed by a 10-member Church Council. The Council, empowered by a set of Bylaws adopted in 1996, carries out the activities and programs of the church in collaboration with church committees. The minister is a non-voting, ex-officio member of all committees and the Church Council.

Church Programs

Consistent with the position of Northbrae in the community, our programs are diverse. They may be grouped into three categories: spiritual, social, and community outreach.

Spirituality programs include:

- Sunday morning worship services
- Special worship events including Maundy Thursday service; Blessing of the Animals; Harvest Festival; Christmas Eve Candlelight service
- Weekly Meditation Group
- Choir, 3 Sundays/month
- Young Adult Seekers group
- Monthly Support Group
- Care team of 20 members
- Theology Discussion Group
- Write for Your Life group focused on personal spiritual exploration
- World Religions for Curious People
- Spiritual retreats

Social programs include:

- Periodic Lecture Series
- Sunday Night Book Group
- Occasional small group dinner parties for groups of 6-10 persons
- Annual events including Easter morning egg-hunt on the front lawn, Mother's Day luncheon prepared by the men of the church, a fall bazaar, and holiday "Hanging of the Greens, cookie walk and caroling"
- Learning to Fall Safely Class
- Monthly Movie Night

Community Outreach

The community outreach and involvement activities include several opportunities to provide service and support to outside agencies including:

- Heifer Project
- Alameda County Community Food Bank
- Berkeley Women's Daytime Drop in Center
- Berkeley Food & Housing Project
- Berkeley's Youth Engagement Advocacy and Housing Program – (YEAH!)
- Options for Recovery
- Frozen Assets – food for sick and shut-ins
- Ad hoc collections for emergency efforts such as Haiti, Pakistan, Katrina Relief, etc.

The Church also reaches out to the community in many other ways. Our doors are open most days and evenings to over 50 community groups serving more than 500 people each week. We rent office space to the Chaplaincy Institute, an Interfaith Seminary; Cazadero Music Camp, American Association of University Women, therapists specializing in youth, and a preschool. A large Buddhist-based group meets regularly in the chapel. We have

ten 12-step groups meeting weekly, a toddler sing-along group, puppy training classes, folk dancing and many more.

Northbrae offers its facilities and ministerial services to community members for weddings, baptisms, and memorial services, as well as landmark religious ceremonies and other special life events.

Physical Features and Symbols

Northbrae Community Church's physical plant includes approximately two acres of landscaped grounds, three well-maintained buildings and a 50-space parking lot. The Chapel was completed in 1957 and is a beautiful stone and wood A-frame structure with spectacular stained-glass windows and glass doors that open to small inner gardens. It seats approximately 300 people. Haver Hall is a classic 100-year-old structure which housed the original sanctuary and now provides a variety of meeting spaces and offices. The Hut is rented to a non-profit cooperative nurse school.

The Torchbearer stained glass windows in our Chapel embody the Northbrae narrative, suggesting that we organize our polity not around doctrine or creeds, but around "Torchbearers," including Jesus, Gandhi, Buddha, St. Francis of Assisi, and Abraham Lincoln.

It is important to note our deep-felt connection to nature reflected in our Fourth Wall: glass doors looking out to our beautiful gardens. (View photos on the Northbrae website, www.northbrae.org)

In 2019, a major structural repair was required when dry rot was discovered in a Chapel beam. The congregation sprang into action, raising the funds needed to repair the beam and the damaged stained-glass windows.

Sacred Hoop Garden and Columbarium

The creation of a special walled garden behind the church was dedicated in 2014 to Native American spirituality and the Huchiun tribe that once lived in our area. It includes a medicine wheel of stones on the ground, is encircled with native plants used by the Huchiuns, and features a columbarium.

The columbarium serves the Berkeley community as well as members of the Northbrae family, extending in yet another way our service to our community.

The garden itself is envisioned as a quiet, secluded place for reflection and remembrance of those who are part of our history.

Staff

Northbrae currently has a small paid part-time staff, supplemented by dedicated volunteers. The budget supports the following: Minister, Pastoral Care Chaplain; Music Director who supervises paid soloists for Sunday services; and Business Administrator who manages the business of the church, the church facilities, rentals, and day-to-day operations and supervises other paid facilities staff.

Financial Summary

Northbrae Community Church's 2019 operating budget includes \$325,000 for total revenues and expenses. The budget is cushioned by an Endowment Fund and a portion of the revenue from Columbarium Niches. 70% of the budget is from rental fees

Website <http://www.northbrae.org>

Northbrae's Purpose: Our long-time Statement of Purpose continues to have meaning for members:

"We join ourselves together as a church in the interest of morality and religion as interpreted by the growing thought and purest lives of humanity, hoping thereby to bear one another's burdens and promote truth, righteousness, and love in the world."

The Future

In February 2020, the Church Council and Congregation unanimously approved these Mission and Vision statements:

Mission:

Northbrae is a welcoming and diverse community of spiritual seekers inspired by Christian roots, receptive to all faiths and personal beliefs, and committed to service for our community with reverence for all humanity and the Earth.

Vision:

- Provide a warm and loving welcome for spiritual exploration and growth.
- Expand multi-faith and educational programs relevant to present and future generations to help create a just and sustainable world.
- Build a vibrant community gathering place for all people.