

SonCoast Community Church Profile

THE COMMUNITY

SonCoast Community Church is located in the large, urbanized southeast Florida metroplex stretching through three counties from Miami northward to north of West Palm Beach. The church is in the north end of Boca Raton, Florida, near its border with the City of Delray Beach. However, in addition to these two cities the church draws its membership from cities both north and south of Boca and Delray. In the last five years the population of Boca Raton increased from 84,392 to 87,766 while Delray grew from 60,522 to 63,175.

Boca Raton and Delray Beach are quite different from each other. Boca Raton is a relatively homogeneous wealthy city with a median household income of \$70,699 and only 5.6% of families below the poverty level. It has a small Black population (5%) but a larger number of Hispanics (12%). People with a Jewish are a very large portion of Boca's population. Delray Beach, on the other hand, is much more diverse. It is 28% Black with at least one third of that number being Haitian immigrants or their first or second generation descendants. Hispanics form 9% of the population. It has both very wealthy and relatively poor areas. The median family income is \$49,123 and 11% of families are below the poverty level. Both cities have large retiree populations with 21% and 24% of the population being over the age of 65 in Boca Raton and Delray Beach respectively. Downtown Delray Beach and its public beach area have become very active and trendy. They attract both South Florida residents and tourists from all over the world.

The City of Boca Raton is the home to Florida Atlantic University and many corporate headquarters, such as Office Depot. Delray Beach is comprised primarily of small businesses. It also has a reputation as the addiction recovery capital of the eastern United States as it is home to a large number of treatment centers.

School districts in Florida cover the entire county. The Palm Beach School District, where Boca and Delray are located, is one of the largest school districts in the nation. The schools in Delray Beach and Boca Raton generally have a good reputation for providing a quality education.

THE CHURCH

Description. SonCoast identifies itself as "a place of grace". Our quest is to "know God's love and to make it known" by the way we live in Christian community, not hiding our brokenness behind masks, loving as we have been and want to be loved. As is evidenced by our Statement of Faith, we focus on the core principles and seek not to exclude anyone or divide over disputable matters.

The church's largest ministry is Celebrate Recovery which offers Biblical recovery from hurts, habits and hang-ups. Anywhere from 60 to 130 people, many of whom do not attend SonCoast, meet weekly for a meal, worship, and small groups for all types of addictions, such as

drugs, alcohol, anger, gaming, pornography, and codependency. Complimenting this ministry are twelve step groups and Life Skills classes.

Life Skills integrates Biblical wisdom and modern neuroscience to identify and correct behavior patterns, mostly learned in childhood, which harm our ability to relate joyfully to God and others. Life Skills frees people up to relate well. It provides the practical means of giving and receiving love and grace while living in gratitude.

Other ministries include a children's ministry, youth ministry, men's and women's ministries and a singles ministry.

In addition to these ministries the church provides meeting space for a Classical Conversations home school group and a *Via de Cristo* leadership group. Classical Conversations is led by some of our members. It equips students with a Christian worldview and the classical abilities to absorb knowledge, operate logically and to speak publicly with confidence and persuade through orderly rhetoric. Several young families have come to the church through Classical Conversations. *Via de Cristo*, also known as Cursillo and Road to Emmaus, has been participated by many of our members and church leaders, some of whom remain engaged in planning and presenting *Via de Cristo* weekends.

We support a number of mission programs. Funds are contributed monthly to the North American Baptist Conference (NAB) mission program. Contributions also go to Mustard Seeds and Mountains, a mission to the poor of McDowell County, West Virginia and Bakersfield, California; First Care Pregnancy Center, a local ministry to unwed mothers; and Cantaros de Bendicion, a ministry to pastors and their wives in Latin America as well as Spanish speaking churches in the U.S. One couple in our church spent several years in Peru ministering to people in the slums of Lima. They are back in the states now, but they still raise support for feeding centers reaching about 700 children and go down to Peru a couple of times each year in support of local pastors and churches. Our church also makes Christmas card for all these children every year and raises funds to provide Christmas gifts for them. In addition we are actively involved in Mustard Seeds and Mountains, having sent teams of youth and adults to McDowell County at least ten times to repair homes for one week during the summer. On an annual basis we also collect funds for 4 Kids of South Florida, a ministry which trains couples to be foster parents, and we collect nonperishable food and make up brown bags containing food and information on locally available service to give to homeless persons.

Culture and Governance. The church culture is generally relaxed and informal, although not to an extreme. Worship is contemporary, led by a Worship Team. The church fosters transparency without a lot of pretense. People are real, and grace is freely given and received.

The average age of our church members is probably mid to upper forties. We have a good mix of families, singles, teenagers and children. To describe a typical church member is difficult as the church includes a diverse mix of professionals, blue collar workers, service employees and

retirees. We also have people from some addiction treatment centers who attend our worship. Most of them are in their late teens or early twenties.

The church is governed and led by a Board of Elders. However, the congregation votes on the annual budget, calling a pastor and taking on debt as well as any changes to the church bylaws. The elders seek to make decisions by consensus.

History. SonCoast was founded as SonCoast Calvary by Pastor Chris Cowen in 1994. He was on staff at Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale and felt led to start a new church in the Boca Raton area. The new church, however, was non-denominational and not affiliated with the Calvary Chapels. For six years the church met in the gymnasium at Boca Raton Elementary School in the south end of Boca Raton. Then in 2000 SonCoast merged with Evangel Baptist Church, a North American Baptist Conference church which had been started in the 1980's by retirees from the north central area of the U.S. Their pastor had just retired and they were an elderly congregation in danger of dying out. (We think it reflects the real blessing of grace here that the retired pastor and his wife are still active participants in our congregation.) A condition of the merger was that SonCoast become affiliated with NAB. Also at that point our name was changed to SonCoast Community Church. Pastor Chris left in 2007 and the church called Mitch Dillon to be our next pastor. He served the church for eight years until August of 2015 when he decided to retire.

The Next Pastor. Our next pastor needs to be someone who loves God and loves people - who is comfortable with the broken people who come through our doors. He should be one who gives and lives grace because he is deeply aware of his personal need for grace; someone who sees himself practically as in active recovery from sin like all of us; someone able to humbly receive as much or more than he gives, who sees life with broken people as a gift by which to go deeper into his own brokenness, who can live and preach faith in the present tense in the midst of uncertainty, who abides and rests in Christ and can teach us to be still and know God by example in the midst of his own stress, troubles, crises and pain. He should be a man of prayer who is a humble servant-leader who is real and vulnerable with no masks. He needs to be someone who is energetic, strong in Bible based teaching, and who is an engaging, dynamic speaker. He needs to be truly excited about impacting lives for Christ.

Facilities. Since the merger we have been able to improve our facilities and they are currently in good condition. The one need we have is for more classroom space. We manage with what we have, but really need additional classrooms for children's ministry, Classical Conversations and Celebrate Recovery groups. Twelve step groups currently meet in rooms which are offices during the work day.

Areas Needing Growth. The children, youth and special needs ministries and outreach are areas of our church life that need to be strengthened.