

PASTORAL CANDIDATE PACKET



Aliso Creek Church

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Greetings

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

We are Aliso Creek Church. After the relocation of pastor Nick Locke in the summer of 2025, and the retirement of our long-time lead pastor, Tom Gastil, at the end of May in 2026, we are prayerfully looking forward to how our next senior pastor will shepherd the flock, continuing the good work Tom and Nick have done. We are humbled and grateful that you would take the time to prayerfully consider this opportunity.

Through the words and pictures that follow, we hope to give you a window into our community in Orange County, California and a glimpse of our church's place within it. If you feel God's call to step out in faith and lead our church, we'd love to meet you!

We are praying for you, and we hope you will pray for us as we embark on this journey. God is good, and we know He has a plan for our congregation and the tiny sliver of His beautiful kingdom that we call home.

In Christ,
The Pastoral Search Committee
and Session





The Story of Aliso Creek Church

The Inception of Aliso Creek Church

Aliso Creek is a stream that flows through South Orange County, connecting a diverse array of communities as it runs from the Santa Ana mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Pastors Thom Venema and Phil Clark felt God's call to serve the communities connected by the Aliso Creek. So, in 1985, they started Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church ("ACPC") as a mission church and the only PCA church in the area at the time. After months of holding services as a house church, we held our first public worship service on Easter Sunday at Moulton Elementary School in Laguna Niguel. A few months later, we achieved "organized" status and became a particular church, which included electing Ruling Elders to form a Session with Thom as our transitional pastor.

Since 1985, God's faithful blessings have abounded. He has sustained us by His grace through every season. While we don't own a sanctuary, God has richly provided us with worship facilities—ranging from homes and school buildings to larger sanctuaries that we've rented from other denominations. His loving care has extended far beyond where we hold worship services. For the church's 40 years of existence, He has provided

pastors who have been faithful in their preaching of His Word and in their care of His flock. We have truly been blessed to have been led by only a few lead pastors over that time: Thom Venema as our founding pastor (1985-1986), Walt Shephard immediately following (1987-1997), and Tom Gastil (1998-2026). These men have been faithful to God by ministering to this flock. They have loved us, even as we have loved them.

Commitment to Teaching and Preaching

Since calling Tom to be our pastor, we have enjoyed a steady commitment to preaching the gospel and teaching the reformed tradition. From 1998 to 2014, ACPC more directly led with our presbyterian identity. Under Tom's leadership, we have always been shaped by a consistent message from the pulpit and in our ministries: we are sinners who need the salvation that God provided by sending His Son as the perfect sacrifice for our redemption. The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ was, and continues to be, the primary value of our church. As our website states, "all of our beliefs and practices flow from [the gospel] because it lies at the heart of the Bible's message."

This gospel commitment also shapes our support for ministries and missionaries who share our vision for spreading the good news.

After 29 years of existence, the church faced several external challenges. Whether for cultural, demographic, or economic reasons, we experienced a decline in younger congregants. While some of the founding members and older saints were still faithfully attending, young believers were moving to other areas of the country (due to the cost of living in South Orange County or for college) or to other churches. Additionally, other PCA churches had been established in nearby areas, which was a positive development but provided additional, alternative opportunities for worship.

In 2014, we hired Nick Locke to become our youth pastor to bolster the youth ministry and connect with younger families. Nick went on to be ordained and became part of our church's pastoral staff. We saw Nick mature in his pastoral role and we as a congregation grew under his care. During this season, Nick and Tom intentionally embraced a more "winsomely" reformed approach to leading us. They taught us the gospel of grace in a way that engaged us at a deep level, encouraged us to be missionaries in our communities, and welcomed those who were newer to the faith or the reformed tradition.

After 11 years of faithful service at our church, Nick accepted a call to Grace Church in Pasadena—where he and his wife Katie attended early in their marriage. Nick's relocation also brings his growing family closer to their extended family and roots in Ventura. We are so grateful for Nick's

ministry and are thrilled to see God employ his talents in Pasadena.

After almost three decades of fruitful leadership at our church, Tom has recently retired. We have been greatly blessed by Tom's ministry and are grateful for his stable, Gospel-driven leadership. Tom's and Nick's departures are bittersweet for our community, even as they open the door for the next chapter in our story

We are eager to continue to cultivate the good work established by Nick and Tom over the last decade in faithful Gospel preaching, executing our vision, supporting our staff, consciously connecting with members and newcomers, and serving our area as we embrace this season of transition in hope. We believe God is with us and we're excited to share the unique "gem" that we are with more friends and neighbors.



Commitment to Intergenerational Community And Outreach

In 2014, our church became a long-term tenant of the Jewish Temple Beth El in Aliso Viejo, which is where we meet currently. The Temple graciously allows us permanent signage, and in a new effort to reach out to the community, Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church was renamed Aliso Creek Church ("ACC"). Since that time, ACC has been blessed to welcome new parishioners, young and old, singles, and those with larger families into our covenant community. In addition to our Sunday worship which is central to our unity, we fellowship together through beach days, picnics, our



annual congregational dinner, and community group gatherings. Our church loves to gather over food and enjoy the outdoor beauty of our natural environment.

We are committed to providing intentional spiritual nourishment through the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments to our congregants. We host a weekly Discipleship Hour (Sunday School) typically in the fall and spring, have a growing children's choir, a summer VBS program, and a youth group. Our members often meet together in community groups and enjoy living life together. Throughout ACC's history, many of its teenagers have attended and greatly benefited from the PCA's YXL (Youth eXcelling in Leadership) summer camp.

Over the past decade, the church has built vibrant ministries, including local and global outreach teams. Locally, we partner with organizations like the Orange County Rescue Mission and Double R Ranch, while globally, we support about thirty missionaries spreading hope worldwide. These efforts embody our mission to love God and neighbor with purpose and compassion. We also have an English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry that has been extremely well received in our community and which fosters relationships

between those who volunteer and our diverse neighbors.

Headwinds and Challenges

In South Orange County, a church that preaches the gospel weekly and adheres to the beauty of the reformed tradition is a true "gem." The area is filled with high achieving, affluent people who have found material success through hard work and merit. People here struggle to see their desperate need for forgiveness and a Savior who redeems and reconciles them to their Creator. ACC seeks to be a beacon of light that points to hope and true rest in the gospel of Jesus.

In the city of Aliso Viejo, around 2% of the population identifies as Presbyterian; around 18% identify with other Christian denominations. The values of the PCA (e.g., covenant family, church membership, liturgy and sacraments, and the faithful study of God's Word) stand in stark contrast with the attitude of most people, even believers, in Orange County who are pursuing a fast-paced, restless existence. ACC faces the challenge of remaining committed to our denominational values while trying to be attractive to a population which is generally alienated by the thought of being committed and accountable to

a local church. We try to provide a welcoming environment that preaches the gospel of Jesus without being exclusive in the way we frame our vision and values. We want to welcome many more people into the congregation who have no background in the PCA or in the reformed tradition but who are longing for connection, Christ-filled truth, and genuine care. Many of our members have joined because of our winsome way of preaching and teaching the riches of the gospel.

God's Continued Care for Aliso Creek Church

As a 40-year-old church, we've known both joy and sorrow. We've been blessed by God's faithfulness through the years as we continue to worship, glorify, and serve Him. As our congregation has aged, we've grieved the loss of cherished members, but we've rejoiced as new members join our covenant family. God has shaped us into a community that values the good news of Christ's finished work for us on the cross and the Spirit's empowerment to live faithfully for Him. We seek to find rest and hope in the reconciliation and salvation that He accomplished on our behalf, and we want to share that good news with our community.

We are incredibly grateful for God's faithfulness to this local body of believers in South Orange County. We humbly ask for His guidance as we search for a pastor who can shepherd a multi-generational congregation, who will proclaim the gospel from the pulpit, who loves and will teach us the depths of the reformed tradition, and who will lead us to win others for our Savior, Jesus Christ



Our Congregation and Community



Aliso Viejo, Orange County California

THE HOME OF ALISO CREEK CHURCH

ACC is based in Aliso Viejo, a young suburban city which is centrally located in Orange County, California. ACC's members are spread throughout Orange County, from Costa Mesa to San Clemente, although a large subset of the membership calls Aliso Viejo home.

Orange County sits along the Pacific Coast between Los Angeles and San Diego, and offers a lifestyle as unique as its climate. With almost 300 “sunny days” in the average year, life in Orange County is sun-drenched and vibrant. Coastal beach towns (like San Clemente, Dana Point, Laguna Beach, and Newport Beach) boast well-maintained harbors, clean beaches, and a diverse array of marine activities (like ocean fishing and surfing) along with world-class shopping malls and restaurants. Further inland, the cities each take on a life of their own. San Juan Capistrano features a historic mission and downtown district reminiscent of California's early days, with a thriving equestrian culture and beautiful Spanish architecture. Further north, Costa Mesa boasts a young, artistic culture with numerous chef-owned restaurants and trendy coffee shops. Irvine is the economic hub of Orange County,



centrally planned and decidedly corporate; many well-known global businesses maintain offices in its striking glass high-rises.

Aliso Viejo, and its surrounding cities of Mission Viejo, Ladera Ranch, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Hills, and Lake Forest, sits centrally located amongst this landscape. These cities are clean, well maintained, and host a mix of apartment and single-family homes spread between attractive shopping centers and grassy parks.

With its urban centers and canyon-lined suburbs, Aliso Viejo offers a peaceful rhythm with endless opportunities close by—just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean, under 100 miles from ski resorts like Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead, and roughly 60 miles from the creeping sprawl of Los Angeles. It is a picture of the Southern California dream: blue skies, mild

weather, and everything within reach. It's also one of the safest cities in California.

The climate here (and in Orange County generally) is one of the city's quiet gifts. Winters are cool but pleasant, springs and falls are warm and gentle, and summers offer dry, sunny days perfect for afternoons at the beach, picnics, and pool parties. Outdoor activities are a constant attraction. Hikers, bikers, and walkers frequent the city's trail systems that link neighborhoods to wilderness parks and coastal overlooks. Locals prioritize fitness and wellness, and it's not unusual to pass yoga classes in the park or surfers heading to Salt Creek Beach after work.

There's a cultural richness, too. Live performances at the nearby Segerstrom Center for the Arts and the Laguna Playhouse bring world-class theater to the area. The Bowers Museum, the Irvine Museum, and the Richard Nixon Library are just a short drive away. Food lovers have an endless array of options nearby, from local breweries to the world-famous In-And-Out Burger to Michelin-star restaurants.

Families are drawn here for more than the scenery. The Capistrano Unified School District, which serves much of Aliso Viejo, is near the top of districts state-wide. There's a thriving homeschool community and an abundance of private Christian schools, including Geneva School of Orange County (where several of ACC's staff currently teach), Capistrano Valley Christian School, and Crean Lutheran High School. Higher education is close at hand, with Soka University (a Buddhist school) located within the city, and institutions like

UC Irvine (home to a Reformed University Fellowship), Concordia University Irvine (a Lutheran college), and Saddleback Community College all nearby. And of course, the world-renowned campuses of UCLA and USC are only about an hour away.

Our Mission

THE PEOPLE OF ORANGE COUNTY.

Over three million people live in Orange County, and about 50,000 call Aliso Viejo home. Twenty years ago, the average person would probably have described Orange County's population as largely white, Republican, and loosely-Christian. But that has changed.

Today, while over a third of Orange County's population identifies as white, roughly a third of the population identifies as Latino and about a quarter identify as Asian. There is also a growing number of people from the Middle East who call Orange County their home. Almost



a third of the people who live in Orange County were born in another country, and almost half of Orange County residents say that they speak a non-English language in their homes. In short, this is a diverse county, home to many immigrants. Aliso Viejo largely tracks the broader demographic information of Orange County, with white, Latino, and Asian people forming most of its constituents.

Religiously, Orange County's population is similarly diverse. Catholics make up the largest subset, followed by non-denominational Chris-

Soka University (a Buddhist college), Compass Bible Church (a large non-denominational Christian congregation), and Corpus Christi (a large Catholic church neighboring Temple Beth El).

One stereotype about Orange County is decidedly accurate. It is a uniquely affluent area. The median household income in Orange County is about \$113,000 (compared to about \$96,000 for California as a whole). The median household income in Aliso Viejo is about \$137,000, a figure which dwarfs the national median (about \$77,000). And in some cities, like Newport Beach, the median household income jumps to almost \$160,000. In short, Orange County's temperate climate and coastal location come with a high cost of living.

Finally, Orange County is now decidedly a "purple" county—after decades of voting predominantly "red." Voter registration shows that the split between Democrats and Republicans in the county is nearly equal.

Joys and challenges of life in Orange County.

Orange County, and Aliso Viejo within it, is a place of paradox and beauty—sun-drenched and fast-paced, deeply resourced yet often spiritually searching. Its people view themselves not as broken, but as ever-chasing. Because Orange County offers "everything" it is a region where affluence and anxiety often live side-by-side. The culture is busy, driven, and image-conscious. Behind carefully maintained homes and planned communities, there are real struggles with isolation, discontentment, and a hunger for deep connection.

We at ACC hope, by God's grace, to meet our neighbors amidst these struggles. Our vision is not to match the culture's pace, but to serve our neighbors with intentional community and offer



tian churches, Southern Baptists, Mormons, and Muslims, respectively. As to be expected in a large, urban setting, there are trace adherents to every major religion, and a significant portion of Orange County's population identifies as not religious. Aliso Viejo tracks these broader demographics, although it likely contains a larger percentage of Buddhist and Muslim people than Orange County in general. Our immediate community includes our landlords at Temple Beth El,

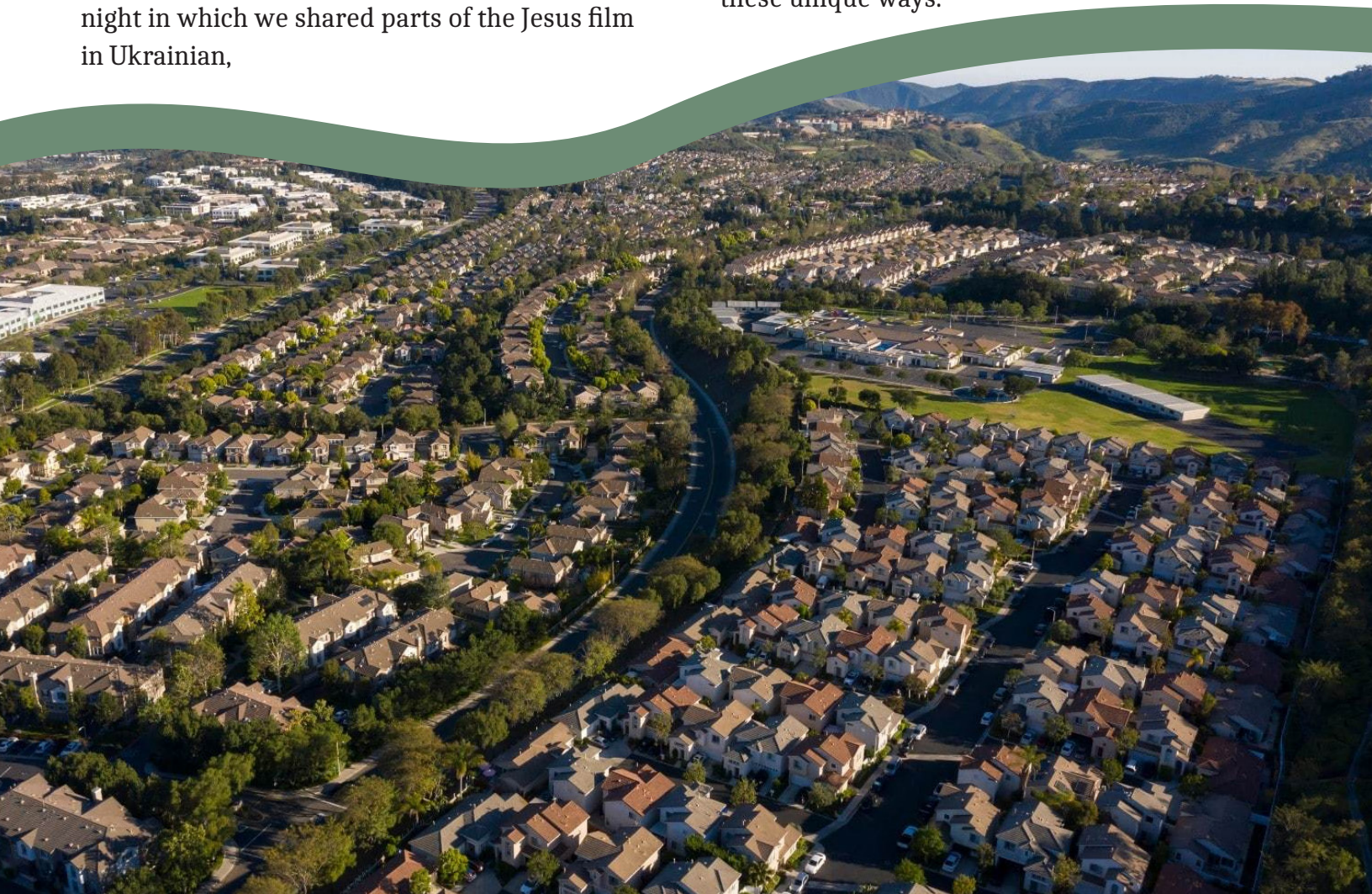
the Gospel as the only path to true, lasting peace. To that end, ACC has fostered several ministries intended to reach our neighbors where they are.

One such ministry that God has blessed greatly is our ESL ministry. We invite anyone and everyone to come and learn English from trained volunteers every Wednesday night for two hours, during which time we also provide refreshments. These meetings feature a short devotional where the pastor shares the Gospel with all who come, tailored to each level of English comprehension.

This ministry has blossomed quickly, with approximately 50 students and over 25 volunteers participating in our Wednesday classes. Most of these attendees are not Christians and are recent immigrants from Asian or Middle Eastern countries. These relationships have opened the door to conversations about Jesus and a movie night in which we shared parts of the Jesus film in Ukrainian,

Farsi, and Spanish. We are extremely grateful for how God has prospered this ministry and allowed us to connect with our neighbors in new and meaningful ways.

As we step in faith into this new chapter of our community together, we hope to use the success of our ESL ministry as a template for other ministries and opportunities. In recent months, we have offered Farsi bulletins and live sermon translation to a small group of attendees who have connected with us through the ESL ministry. ESL has thus been a springboard for exploring ways we serve and reach our neighbors in Aliso Viejo who look different than in other parts of the United States: instead of food, our neighbors need resources; instead of housing, our neighbors need connection. We hope that our new pastor will share our vision and help guide new ministries to serve our neighbors in these unique ways.





Church Aspirations | Candidate Considerations

Church Aspirations

We envision a church where people from every generation and background discover genuine rest in Jesus. Our mission is to warmly welcome others in and boldly carry the good news beyond our walls—serving our neighbors with love and making disciples in Orange County and across the globe. We seek to do so while embracing our Core Values of the Gospel, Rest, Community, Formation, and Purpose (see the Vision and Values section of our website for a more detailed explanation of these values). In alignment with this vision, we strive to pursue the following objectives:

- **Gospel-Centered Preaching:** We affirm the unique role of preaching as the centerpiece of Sunday work and the ministry and mission of our church. We seek to be fed weekly by a sermon that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ, teaches the principles of reformed theology in a winsome and non-dogmatic manner and applies the truth of Scripture to the challenges we face in everyday life.
- **Reach the Unreached:** In a neighborhood and a world where so many live without the hope of Christ, we long to see lives transformed as people encounter Jesus through our faithful participation in His redemptive work—both locally and globally.
- **Cultivate Community:** We aim to create a gracious, loving environment where ev-

everyone feels embraced and no one feels like an outsider.

- **Engage Our Neighborhood:** We want to better reflect Aliso Viejo's community demographics and attract people of all ages and races to our congregation.
- **Appeal to Families and Young Adults:** We want to grow our outreach efforts toward families (especially those with young children) and be a welcoming, spiritually enriching space for young adults in our community. We desire a growing and thriving youth group and children ministry.
- **Equip Our Leaders:** We are blessed with devoted, godly leaders. We're committed to supporting and growing these leaders while raising up the next generation to serve with purpose and passion.
- **Encourage Growth:** In a world constantly shaping us, we lean into the gospel to be transformed into Christ's likeness. Through Scripture, prayer, worship, and community, God forms us into His image—renewing our hearts and minds with rhythms of grace that fuel both personal growth and missional living.
- **Advance ESL Ministry:** Building on two vibrant years, we're excited to expand and deepen our ESL outreach.

Candidate Considerations

At ACC, we've been blessed with steady, committed leadership. We give thanks for the many ways Tom has led us for nearly 30 years to be a warm, welcoming, Christ-centered community that celebrates the gospel weekly in Word, sacrament, and care for one another. We're searching for our next long-term pastor who will continue the good work that Tom and Nick have done. Our next pastor will shepherd the church into a new season of growth and ministry.

We have hired an interim pastor to fill the immediate void left by Tom's retirement, Joel Pelsue, who will serve in that role until we hire our next lead pastor. We hope our next lead pastor will be gifted in preaching, teaching, counseling, and pastoral care ministries—bringing biblical depth that engages mature believers while remaining clear and relatable to newcomers.

We envision that our next long-term leader will cultivate ACC's mission and vision, develop and care for our staff, and lead our Session. In particular, the candidate's leadership traits and abilities should include:

- **Gifted Preaching:** Exposit the Bible with a gospel focus, in a way that engages both minds and hearts.
- **Humility:** Lead us through this next chapter with grace, wisdom, and a servant's heart.
- **Approachability:** Exhibit an inviting and non-anxious presence that welcomes dialogue and questions.
- **Vision and Care:** Provide thoughtful administrative leadership to the church staff, fostering a culture of appreciation, unity, and continual development.

- **Mission-Driven:** Collaborate with the Session to cast and execute vision that aligns with our core mission, values, and aspirations.
- **Innovate with Purpose:** Be open to creative ideas and new expressions of ministry that support both spiritual and numerical growth.
- **Strategic Planning:** Help guide the church calendar and ministry programming—including sermon series, outreach, worship, discipleship events, and classes such as Grace Conversations, Theology on Tap, VBS, Bible reading plans, and our New Members Class.
- **Build Community Partnerships:** Nurture partnerships with other churches and organizations to enhance youth events and community outreach.
- **Invest in Discipleship:** Be passionate about mentoring others, practicing hospitality, fostering relationships, and developing emerging leaders.
- **Honor Tradition, Embrace Context:** Make our church's valued traditions accessible and meaningful for those unfamiliar with them—bridging the past and future with grace.

We are excited about this process and humbly submit ourselves to God's plan for our congregation. If you believe you may be a fit to serve God as our next long term pastor, we'd love to hear from you!

How To Apply

Step 1

Please prepare a cover letter, resume, and response to the questions below. Please limit your responses to the questions to three pages total.

1. As you have considered this role and researched ACC, what stands out about our church that matches your gifting and your passions for ministry?
2. Please share specific areas of personal and ministry growth over the past five years and how these experiences have prepared you for this role.
3. What are some reasons that ministering in California would be life-giving to you and what challenges do you anticipate in moving to Orange County?
4. Is there anything else about your story that would be helpful for us to know as we prayerfully consider your candidacy?

Step 2

Please use the following format to label all attachments:

FirstnameLastname_Resume.

(Examples: JohnSmith_CoverLetter | JohnSmith_Resume | JohnSmith_Questions)

Step 3

Send all attachments as PDFs to psc@alisocreekchurch.org.

Thank you for your interest. The PSC will begin review of all applications immediately and continue until the position is filled.



Aliso Creek Church

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