

District Executive Minister's Report

Russ Matteson

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-21, The Message)

These exhortations, which come to us from Paul's earliest preserved writing, are a solid piece of wisdom for the work of your District Executive Minister. In my ministry with and among you I find myself constant in prayer, grateful for the expressions of God's Spirit in our congregations, and giving thanks for the variety of gifts that are present among our congregations and this district. Though we are different in some ways, we are striving to follow Jesus. Though we are spread throughout these two states, we are committed to the communities that we serve. Though we sing and pray in different languages, the good news of God's love for all people is our common voice.

The paragraphs that follow will give you some sense of the ministry you have called me to, and the ways in which together we are the family of God through the Church of the Brethren in the Pacific Southwest.

Congregational Visits - A high priority for my work continues to be connecting with congregations - in worship, with leadership groups, and with pastors. Most Sundays you will find me in one of our congregations, and this year I have preached, participated in licensings, commissionings, ordinations, and installations, as well as simply visited. I have met with several boards/leadership teams, search committees, and Sunday School classes. I continue to enjoy getting a deeper feel for the faith and life of our congregations. I am grateful for the warm welcome in Christ that I have received from all of you.

Pastoral Transitions - Several congregations have been through leadership transitions during the past year and I have provided support and guidance as they move through these times of transition. Below is information on the various transitions:

Glendale - Michael Fletcher began as the interim pastor in January and continues to serve.

The congregation is getting back on their feet following the death of John Jackson. The Search Committee has been formed, a profile created, and they are moving into interviews with prospective pastoral candidates.

Tucson - Ernie Snyder retired at the beginning of the year after 20 years of service to the congregation. They called Nelda Rhoades Clarke, who had moved to Tucson two years ago and was worshipping with them, to serve them as part-time pastor, which she has been doing since January. I officiated at her installation in February.

Live Oak - Erik Brummett was called by the congregation to be their part-time pastor beginning in February of this year. This is Erik's first call since completing Seminary, and we are glad to welcome him to the PSWD.

Pomona Fellowship - Andrew Sampson resigned and completed his service in June. The congregation has called Jeff Glass to serve as a $\frac{3}{4}$ time interim pastor who is working with them on vision and direction before they form a search committee and begin the search for a settled pastor.

Bakersfield - James Isaacs announced that he will retire as pastor in February 2017. They have formed a search committee and are beginning the work of preparing to call a new pastor.

Ministry Partnership Funds - New in 2016, this model of encouraging congregations to try new ministries, or to engage in work towards renewal and revitalization, or to support mission point congregations has begun well. As of this writing, five congregations have participated, and others are in conversation with the district about possible ways of partnership. Those partnerships funded this year include:

Church of the Living Savior (McFarland) - Ministry opportunity as they brought "What on Earth am I here for?" to the congregation and surrounding community.

La Verne - Coaching/Training to work with Roy Oswald as a consultant on a strategic plan and focusing of ministry work.

Empire - Revitalization partnership as they engage in Vital Ministry Journey to work at congregational renewal. Stan Dueck from the COB national staff is their consultant and in the process he is training Dawna Welch and me in how to

facilitate this process with a congregation.

Cristo Sion - Mission Congregation funds to support them as they work with a largely lower income congregation.

Modesto - Coaching/Training to work with Stan Dueck as they explore their ministry priorities in a time of change and transition for the church in society.

Focus and Finances Conversation - Working with the Executive and Policy Board we spent a good deal of time and energy working to identify the primary and secondary areas of priority for our work as a district, and looking to formulate a financial plan to provide for support of priority areas and begin to ensure the future financial viability of the PSWD. There is more detail around this conversation and its work to this point in the preamble to the budget business items (see Exhibit C p.58). The work at naming and prioritizing our areas of focus is nearing completion, and this then will be a working document that will guide our work and be evaluated regularly to make sure we are working in the areas of priority.

Waterford Closure - The year began with helping this congregation come together with one another and friends and former members to give thanks for the witness of the Brethren in Waterford for nearly 100 years. The gathering was well attended and a fitting service of worship. Since that time the Closing Committee has been working to assess the needs of the properties (church and parsonage), and provide for the security of the properties. This work continues and the committee will be bringing recommendations to the Executive Board before the end of 2016. In addition, I am using the Waterford church as my primary office when I am in the northern part of the District which helps improve our insurance coverage on the property.

Philosophy on District Held Properties - The Executive and Policy Boards took time to discuss and articulate how the PSWD will work with real properties that were previously held by a District congregation. Our preference, of course, is that congregations continue to grow and thrive in their witness to the way of Jesus. But when we do take ownership of facilities, we will be intentional about assessing the physical state of the property, and exploring the possibilities for other ministry that the district might support out of the location. In

other words, we are placing a high priority on prayerfully discerning what God might be calling us to do with a property rather than assuming that the best use is to immediately sell the facility.

Council of District Executives - This group of colleagues who are in the same position as me meets together at least twice each year, and in those meetings works to address common concerns across the Districts and interacts with the leadership of the Annual Conference Agencies and their staff. In the months ahead we will be continuing conversation we have been working on over the last two years as we work with the Annual Conference Leadership Team to answer the query from West Marva District which was assigned to us related to accountability of ministers to statements of Annual Conference. In addition, I have begun to serve as representative of the council to the Board of On Earth Peace, and am working on the Executive Development Committee of the council which works to plan a biennial professional growth event for the DEMs and has input into how new DEMs are trained.

PSWD Query to 2016 Annual Conference - Following out of District Conference 2015 and our approval of the query "Living as Christ Calls", time was spent preparing the needed documentation to officially submit the query to the officers and Standing Committee. At Annual Conference I presented the query to the Standing Committee to open their consideration, as well as helping to introduce the query to the delegate body. Standing Committee recommended and the delegate body approved sending the concerns of the query to the Ministry & Mission Board for action as requested. This has been formally communicated to them by the Annual Conference officers and will be an item of business for them when they meet in October.

Professional Growth - I will be a participant in the Middle Judicatory Executive training event through the Alban Institute and Duke Divinity School in early November. This will provide an opportunity for me to engage questions of role, function, and leadership for those serving to support congregations and pastors. I am excited to participate, and believe the opportunity will provide a good chance for me to reflect on ways to move beyond the learning that happened during my first two years in this position.

I am also working on learning Spanish so that I might better communicate with and participate with the PSWD congregations that worship in Spanish. I did manage to share the vows and charge for licensing three new ministers at Principe de Paz in Spanish, but that was reading from a script.

COB Church Planting Conference - PSWD sent a team to this Church of the Brethren gathering in May at Bethany Theological Seminary. The team included Robert Aguirre, Jose Rudy Amaya, Michael Fletcher, Joshua Longbrake, Dawna Welch, and myself. Jeff Glass from our district was also there and joined our conversations as well as leading a few workshops. The event was a powerful opportunity for those who participated, and through them I think there will be many blessings for the District in the days ahead. For three of the participants it was their first exposure to the Church of the Brethren beyond the PSWD. This team continues to connect and is helping to articulate and encourage how we might suggest as a way for moving forward in the area of church planting in PSWD.

Central Korean Evangelical Church Lawsuit - In February we received notification

that the Court had accepted our proposed judgment in the lawsuit we have been a part of for several years. CKEC has appealed that judgment and their initial filing on this is due to the Appellate Court by September 30. We will be working to respond as soon as we know what their objection is. We are hopeful that we can find a way to resolve this situation and move into the future with this settled in the not too distant future. We did receive word in August that the rent being paid by the tenant church has completed paying off the amount owed to the Church of the Brethren Inc. to settle the CKEC mortgage, on which we were the guarantor.

I thank you for your continued prayers for our district, my ministry here, and my family. I give thanks for the many folks who serve in a variety of ways to make the ministry of the District happen. I am grateful for the support that I feel as I talk with people about the what God is inviting us into in partnership with Christ in the PSWD.

Pace e bene (Peace and all good),

Russ Matteson

District Executive Minister

Deceased Ministers

James D. Merrifield - October 4, 2015

John J. Jackson - November 7, 2015

Bryan L. Boyer - April 23, 2016

Jack B. Storne - August 27, 2016

Recognition of Ministers' Ordination Anniversaries

55 Years

Elvis C. Cayford
Marlin L. Heckman
William B. Wash

45 Years

Glenn J. Frazier
John Grindler Katonah

35 Years

Don Booz

30 Years

Ron E.H. Faus
Monty Keeling
Carol A. Wise

—
**Representing 380 years
of service.**
—

District Youth Advisor Report

Five years ago, in 2011, I was called to serve as the Pacific Southwest District youth advisor and one of my first responsibilities was to establish a youth cabinet. Over the past five years, I have had the pleasure of observing the unique leadership skills and inspiring faithfulness of 22 different youth, from 7 different congregations. In that time they helped plan meaningful activities and worship experiences for youth at 5 District Conferences, two spring district youth gatherings, National Youth Conference and a Regional Youth Conference that included Youth from the Pacific Northwest!

Over MLK Weekend 2016, 45 youth and advisors, mostly from California and Washington, gathered at the University of La Verne for the Western Regional Youth Conference, on the theme “Becoming the Beloved Community.” Praise bands from Cristo Si3n, Pr3ncipe de Paz, and Circle of Peace congregations provided music. Guest speakers Dr. Zandra Wagoner and Dr. Richard Rose of ULV, and Dr. Eric Bishop, former PSWD Moderator led us in nightly worship and On Earth Peace’s Matt Guynn provided overall content focused on Dr. King’s philosophy and methodology for challenging violence and building beloved community.

Entering my 6th year, I can humbly say that I continue to feel blessed by the opportunity to serve the PSWD and work along side such bright and promising young leaders of our district. I often hear people talk about youth being the future of our church but I would suggest that they are, in fact, the present church and have much to offer

right here and now!

Four youth have been called to serve on the 2016/2017 Youth Cabinet. Their names and congregations are:

- Elizabeth Piazza - Live Oak
- Jorge Molina - Pr3ncipe de Paz
- Mario Cabrera - Pr3ncipe de Paz

In August we met in Modesto for our first planning retreat. During our time together we participated in a bible study of the Moderator’s theme, helped plan Saturday evening worship, as well as planning opportunities for fun and fellowship at District Conference, 2016. At the end of our time together we scheduled our next meeting to plan a district-wide event for the Spring. Stay tuned more for details on that event in the new year!

Youth attending the 2016 District Conference, will get to know each other through a “Pow-Wow-How” style of sharing God’s presence, as well as participate in bible study, worship and a special off campus event just for YOUth! Housing arrangements have been made for Senior High Youth but all other activities and meals will include Junior High Youth.

The Youth Cabinet will be present at District Conference and can be identified by specially designed t-shirts. I hope you will take the time to introduce yourself and get to know our new PSWD leaders!

In Faith,
Dawna Welch
District Youth Advisor



Western Regional Youth Conference Participants 1/16/2016