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Reflections from the Road

As I make my way up and down Highway 99 and Interstate 210, sit in traffic in the LA area, and experience the desert beauty of Arizona, it is hard to believe that a year has gone by. I am in my second round of seeing the beginning of the blossom season in the Central Valley, snow on the grapevine and Mt. Baldy, and enjoying the winter temps of southern California and Phoenix/Tucson.

I have been blessed to worship with every congregation at least once (and am working my way back through the district churches), and in many ways the pages that follow in this newsletter point to the fruit of some of the work that we have been about together as a District over the last year. Time spent planning and preparing is now beginning to happen with new ministers beginning their call, new pastoral placements, youth events, partnership funds, pastor (and spouse) retreat, and more. I hope you will take the time in reading this newsletter to get to know some of what is happening among the Brethren of Arizona and California.

There have also been moments of sadness during this year. The loss to death of an active pastor in John Jackson. The end of ministry for the Waterford congregation. Yet as we grieve these and other losses, we also find ourselves remembering the witness and legacy that individuals and congregations leave behind – testimonies of faith in the living Christ and God's power to transform our lives and the world.

And the work continues. Congregations and their leaders, both pastors and members, are working hard to share the good news of Jesus with their communities, trying to build vital communities of faith. At the District Executive and Policy Boards we are in conversations about how the district supports the work of



congregations, what we are doing together as a district, and how we use the district's resources (human and financial) to continue the work of Jesus through the Brethren of the Pacific Southwest. As our moderator John Price reminds us with his 2016 theme, we are God's family together, and I hope you will join me in holding each other in prayer – across the miles, through the seasons, in easy and hard times, in what unites and what challenges us – our baptism in Christ has made us family, and for that I am deeply grateful.

Pace y bene (Peace and all good),

Russ Matteson

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Reflections on Youth Ministry and "Faith in the Age of Reason"

by Dawna Welch, PSWD Youth Advisor

Recently I attended a Youth Ministry conference in Dallas, Texas where folks from all walks of life gathered for 4 days with inspirational speakers, thoughtful discussions, and celebratory worship services, all designed to strengthen our ministry with middle school and high school aged students.

Acknowledging that attendance in most mainline denominations is in decline and that we live in a culture with unprecedented access to knowledge, a seemingly insatiable appetite for excitement, and shorter attention spans due to the development of the internet and social media, many congregations report they are

Continued on next page



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having difficulty finding their place in the lives of youth. For instance, “How do we offer the Gospel mystery to Youth of the digital age? To a generation that has been led to believe that every mystery is solvable, given enough study, time and CSI skills?”

Presenters at this conference suggested that every answer to every question seems to raise more questions. They challenged us to consider that the church’s job is not to “solve” these Gospel questions, but to create space and relationship with Youth in order to struggle with their real time quandaries like: *Who am I? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why don’t the people I pray for always get better? Why am I getting bullied at school? Why are school children in Nigeria being kidnapped from their classrooms? How can I make a difference in the world?*

The church can offer something youth do not experience anywhere else in their over scheduled lives - space. Space for grieving and lamenting, space for rituals to process doubt, fear, and anger, space to deepen their Kingdom values. The church offers resources and support through scripture, prayer, and companionship which has more resonance with youth than answers alone and helps us all move closer to the heart of the Gospel. What youth need is space for their faith, a safe space where their questions are welcomed, and where caring adults are willing to walk, work and wonder alongside them.

My big take away from this conference is that Youth Ministry today needs to be more relational than ever before. Our objective is not to simply “see” youth at church, but to be with them on their turf as well, on the soccer pitch, on the baseball fields, in the theaters, and at their shows. In doing so we might just learn that youth who are less likely to come to church are more than happy to welcome the church that comes to them!

As I work to support the PSWD congregations and their ministry with youth I would be happy to meet with local leadership to continue this conversation.

District Office / Staff Schedule

- **District Executive Minister Russ Matteson** takes Tuesdays as his day off, and can be reached at 909-392-4052 or DE@pswdcob.org
 - **Administrative Assistant Joe Vecchio** is in the office Monday-Friday, 7:30am - 4:00pm, and can be reached at 909-392-4051 or FrontDesk@pswdcob.org
 - **Youth Advisor Dawna Welch** is off on Mondays, and can be reached at 909-267-5477 or Youth@pswdcob.org
 - The District Office will be closed on Friday March 25, Monday May 30, and Monday July 4.
-

Yarn Bombing the Pulpit at Pomona Fellowship

by Jessie Marsiglio

Yarn Bombing is an old art using yarn and other media in several manners such as crocheting and knitting to create a fresh face on objects such as statues, buildings, lampposts, etc. Several months ago, while getting ready for Bible study, Sander Eller was perusing the Yarn Bomb sites on Google and shared with those present. After discussion we decided to yarn bomb the podium at church as an expression of our desire to honor God and bring a new prospective to our service.

We asked experienced and beginner knitters and crocheters to assist, but, to avoid a stylistically formal display, we did not tell them what it was for, nor suggest size, color, format, etc. On January 7, 2016, Transfiguration Sunday, we “transfigured” (i.e., transformed) the pulpit with the finished product.



Cooper Sampson’s contribution to the “Yarn Bombed” pulpit

Bible and / or Literature Grants

The Margaret Carl Trust Fund can help your church distribute Bibles, Testaments and Gospels, and/or purchase books in support of wellness initiatives and drug education. Applications are due by April 1st or October 1st each year. Late applications are considered in the next cycle. The “Application PDF” is on the web at:

www.pswdcob.org/grants

Ordinations, Licensings, and Commissionings

Last October contained a very busy three days for the Nurturing and Credentialing Committee (NACC), the group responsible for interviewing candidates for the ministry from our district. Over the three days they worked at renewing the licenses of several of our ministers in training, but also interviewed 2 candidates who had completed their training and were ready for ordination, a new minister to our district who comes from another denomination, and three candidates to become licensed ministers and begin their study and continued discernment. All six were approved by the NACC, and then by the Ministry Commission and Executive Board. Following affirmations of call by their congregations, it was time to license, commission and ordain.

Phil Corr, pastor of the **Church of the Living Savior (McFarland) congregation**, is an ordained minister in the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC) and has served in pastorates with them and the UCC. Phil was consecrated as a Commissioned Minister on December 6, our recognition of his ordination from the CCCC while he serves as the pastor at Living Savior. In addition to his pastoral experience, Phil has Ph.D. in Church History from Fuller Seminary and is a scholar of the Congregationalist Mission work of the early 19th century.



Russ Matteson & Phil Corr

Dawna Welch has completed the Training in Ministry (TRIM) program of study and was ordained in the **La Verne congregation** on Sunday, December 29. Dawna serves as the staff for children's ministry at La Verne and as the Youth Advisor for PSWD. Her ordination service included a time of anointing and a song composed for the occasion.



Church leaders pray with Dawna

Robert Aguirre, pastor of the **Cornerstone Reedley congregation** for the last two years, was ordained on January 17. Robert had already completed seminary (Fresno Pacific) when he began to serve



Robert Aguirre & Russ Matteson

Cornerstone, and for the last two years while a licensed minister he has been getting to know the Church of the Brethren better. As a part of worship that Sunday, he and Roxanne's daughters, Mia and Lia, were dedicated.

And the **Príncipe de Paz congregation (Santa Ana)** has been busy calling people into ministry as the three new licensed ministers are all from that congregation. **Edgar and Jessenia Pineda** are a couple who carry leadership roles in the congregation (Board chair and treasurer) and have felt the call to explore and prepare for ministry. Edgar is a truck driver vocationally, and Jessenia is a stay at home parent and an active church worker. The other member who is now licensed is **Florencia Merlos** who is on the leadership team and active in the women's ministry there. Florencia owns an orthodontic business.



Mentor Andrew Sampson, Jose & Florencia Merlos, Jessenia & Edgar Pineda, District Executive Minister Russ Matteson

The three were licensed on January 10, and traveled to New Windsor, MD, in February for their SeBAH orientation (SeBAH is the spanish language ministry training program) and begin their first class in March.

Hold all of these individuals and their congregations in your prayers as they continue to explore and grow in their calling to ministry.

Ministry Partnership Funds What might your congregation try?

New in the 2016 Ministry Investment Plan is the addition of **Ministry Partnership Funds**, a new opportunity for the PSWD to partner with local congregations in ways that encourage them to step out and try something new. Funds are available to support revitalization efforts, coaching/training for a congregation, new ministry opportunities, and mission congregations. The application form is an online process that invites churches to explain what they are wanting to try, how much it will cost, what they hope to gain from the experience, and then based on the size and budget of the congregation the amount of Partnership Funds available from the District will vary, but money will be there to encourage the local church to try something new or different that might strengthen their mission and

ministry. Requests are processed monthly by the Congregation Vitality Task Group of the Board, so funding can happen in as little as 45 days. Some simple, evaluative reporting is all that is requested at two points along the process. Funds for *Mission congregations* are not matching, but are directed to support congregations who have a significant ministry in areas with high levels of poverty.

So what might your church be dreaming of doing? Two partnerships are already at work. The La Verne congregation received support for coaching/training as they are working with a consultant from the EQ-HR Center to help them set and move to working at goals around vitality. Church of the Living Savior (McFarland) received ministry opportunity partnership funds to bring the "What on Earth am I here for?" study to the congregation and community around them during the lenten season. If you are interested, learn more at www.pswdcob.org/churches/grants or contact the District Executive Minister.

Something New From Something Old

The Tucson Church of the Brethren is trying something new. In addition to the regular Sunday morning worship, once a month they will have an alternative gathering. In our time when so many people are busy with work and family (and all that goes with that), it can be difficult to be at church on Sunday morning. In addition, many people are looking for a more intimate way to nurture their faith.

There will be a gathering the second Sunday of the month in the church fellowship hall. The group will sit around a table to share joys and concerns and then talk about issues of the day and how we as Christians are called to respond to these issues. Leadership will be shared. A potluck meal will follow the sharing time.

This is based on the house church concept of the early church when they met in homes and shared a meal.



Pastor Nelda Clarke

This also is how early Brethren came together. In fact homes were sometimes constructed so that walls could be moved back and room made for larger gatherings. Today there is a revival of the house church in some areas. Tucson Church of the Brethren is taking the concept of house church and tying it to the existing facility.

If you know someone in Tucson who might be interested in this fellowship, please let them know. Check out our website at www.tucsonchurchofthebrethren.com. The church is located at 2200 N Dodge Blvd in Tucson. Pastor Nelda can also be reached at the church at 520-327-5106 or nelda51@hotmail.com

New Pastors in the PSWD

2016 has included the welcoming of three new pastors serving congregations in the PSWD.



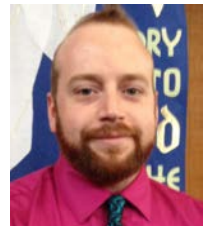
Pastor Nelda (center) with retired Tucson pastors Ernie Snyder & Jim Daughtry

Nelda Rhoades Clarke began serving the **Tucson congregation** as their pastor on January 4, following the retirement of long time pastor Ernie Snyder. Nelda has been a member of the congregation for the last two years since relocating to Tucson with her husband John upon their retirement. Nelda has been ordained for 38 years, and served previously as a pastor, a hospital chaplain, and as a Director of an organization that works with homeless people. Nelda is employed 1/3 time by the congregation.



Michael Fletcher began in February as the half time interim pastor at the **Glendale congregation**, following the death of their pastor John Jackson last November. Michael lives in the Coachella Valley of California, and commutes in to be with the congregation on weekends, as well as being available for calls during the week. Michael has served as a pastor in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, before relocating with his wife Becky to California in the spring of 2015.

The **Live Oak congregation** has called **Erik Brummett** to serve as their half time pastor. This is Erik's first pastoral assignment since graduating from Bethany Theological Seminary. He comes to Live Oak from Indianapolis, Indiana. Jack Storne finished his interim work with the congregation at the end of January.



When you get the opportunity to meet these folks, please extend a warm welcome. We are glad they are serving in PSWD!

A Celebration of Waterford's Ministry

Current and former members, as well as friends from around the district and folks from the community came together on January 9 for an end of ministry worship service at the Waterford Church of the Brethren. The congregation, which has struggled to grow in numbers and finances for several years, voted to close following the retirement of their current pastor, Ann Weaver, at the end of 2015.



Waterford congregation reception

Photo by Jay Irizarry

The service of worship was a time of remembering the many contributions the congregation has made to the local and global community in its 98 years of ministry. Sharing was done by District Moderator John Price, who grew up in the congregation and told stories of the people and events in the congregation who had shaped the Christian living of him and so many other families. Norman Johnson, a long time member with deep family ties to the congregation, shared about the many ways the congregation had been a positive influence in the community and world, ministers and other leaders who had been called out of the Waterford church, and talked about the challenges of keeping a church going when so many young people are called away to new places with more opportunities for work.



Photo by Jay Irizarry

Following the worship service, as the Christ light led people from the sanctuary out into the world, the Brethren gathered in the Social hall for a time of fellowship and connecting. The laughter and sharing as people visited and remembered was a reminder of the vital faith that this congregation inspired in the lives of many.

The church properties are now under the care of the PSWD, and the Closing Committee is evaluating the

buildings and exploring what might make sense for the future of this site. Final decisions will come in the months ahead as the work continues, and an action to formally dissolve the congregation will be on the agenda for District Conference 2016 in Modesto.



District Executive Minister with congregation

Photo by Jay Irizarry

These words shared in the service by Russ Matteson, District Executive Minister, seem an appropriate way to end this article: *"And now the time of ministry by the Waterford Church of the Brethren in this place has come to its end. The life of the congregation has been long and full, filled with all that it means to be Christ's church on this earth. How the seeds of faith planted here and by this congregation will grow and yield fruit is unknown to us with our human eyes, but the words of Psalm 91 remind us that all is held in God's care and protection for those who love God. As the lovely hymn adaptation of this Psalm reminds us in its refrain, God will hold us in the palm of his hand. That is where we place our trust, that is where we find our hope, that is where we know the future lies - all of this in the care of God, made known to us in Jesus. So today, in the midst of all that we feel, we give thanks to God for the ways in which God's word has been made real among this congregation, and the ways in which it is and will continue to be at work in and among the believers in Christ Jesus our Lord."*



Waterford Church of the Brethren Sanctuary

Photo by Jay Irizarry

PSWD Youth . . .

Dawna Welch, PSWD Youth Advisor
Youth@pswdcob.org



2016 / 2017 Youth Cabinet SOON Forming!

What is this and why do I want to be on the cabinet????

Well, who better to plan and provide leadership for youth events and activities than the youth themselves? Who wants to miss out on a great opportunity to have fun and make new friends and develop leadership skills?

The Youth Cabinet is comprised of Middle School and Senior High aged Youth, in grades 8-12 during the 2016 / 2017 school year, from around the District. They work with the Youth Advisor to plan, publicize, and carry out the District's Youth Program for the year including the 2017 Youth Spring Event! Get an application at:

www.pswdcob.org/youth

WRYC 2016

Becoming the Beloved Community



WRYC Praise Band

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 Sión, Príncipe de

Paz, and Circle of Peace congregations provided excellent music leadership and we even learned a new song written by Rudy Amaya and Edgar Flores of Principe de Paz, especially for WRYC! 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.



Dr. Eric Bishop

In order to fully practice being the Beloved Community youth were paired with Belovedness Buddies at the on-set of our time together. Throughout the conference they were given time to pray for each other and wrestle with questions identified by Matt Guynn:

- What is your full human potential? What (inside or outside of you) stands in the way of achieving it?
- Where has the Beloved Community gone wrong in your school, your community, or our world? What could you do to repair it?

Matt Guynn also lead us through the Dr King's 6 Principles of Nonviolence, and youth chose one principle to live with for the next month.

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
2. The *Beloved Community* is the framework for the future.
3. Attack forces of evil, not persons doing evil.
4. Accept suffering, without retaliation, for the sake of the cause to achieve the goal.
5. Avoid internal violence of the spirit, as well as external physical violence.
6. The universe is on the side of justice.

Why not give it a try yourself? Which principle will you choose to live with for 30 days?





2016 Pastor (and Spouse) Retreat

June 13 – 17, 2016

Monday evening through Friday morning

The District Ministry Commission, among its many responsibilities, in most years makes plans for a gathering of Brethren Pastors and Chaplains in the PSWD, and for those who are married their spouses are invited to attend as well. This retreat is a time for renewal and includes spiritual life activities, physical activities, and space for rest and reconnecting with a spouse and with colleagues from around the District. The retreat is not a couples retreat, so single pastors are welcome. The retreat is not a professional growth event, so spouses can find program to support their renewal as well.

The 2016 gathering, held again on the grounds of the Serra Retreat in Malibu, California, will feature Spiritual Director and Retreat Leader Glenn Mitchell providing leadership under the theme *Unbound, Awake and Alive: Tending the Self in Ministry*. The cost is \$50 per person with the vast majority of the expenses underwritten by the Ministry Investment Plan of the PSWD. In addition to Glenn's leadership, there will be daily Christian Yoga with Lorelei Woerner-Eisner, and the opportunity to sign-up for a massage at an additional cost. Afternoons are kept free for rest or exploring, and there will be opportunities for Spiritual Direction as well. Moderator John Price will lead a time of Coming Together on Monday night, and Thursday evening will include a candlelight labyrinth walk, before Friday morning closes with a time of worship.

Congregational leaders, as well as pastors, have received information about this event in the mail. We hope that members of congregations will also encourage their pastors to attend these five days that are intended to deepen the pastor's connection with God and strengthen their calling to ministry in the Church of the Brethren. If you have questions about the retreat, contact Tom Hostetler, chair of the Ministry Commission. More information and registration can be found at:

www.pswdcob.org/events/pastors

A long time ago,
when I was looking for adventure,
I became a seagoing cowboy.

We didn't ride horses. We rode
waves

Come aboard and join author Peggy Reiff Miller and illustrator Claire Ewart as they share the story of Heifer International's original high-sea adventurers, who took livestock to people suffering the effects of World War II.

Ship sets sail March 2016.

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We Are Family

With emphasis on living at peace with one
another as long as it depends on YOU !

Romans 12:17 and 18

We are Family.

The Family of God.

Called to Obedience & Service.

I am hoping that we, that is us in the Pacific Southwest District of the Church of the Brethren, can love one another as family. Letting the DNA that holds us together and makes us family be our confession of Faith. Jesus is Lord! No one can confess Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit being a part of their life. If the Holy Spirit is in us then we are family. For we have been given the power to become children of God. Jesus asked his followers to Love as he had loved. We can do that. If we choose to.

I am calling us to Love first. Accepting one another as family. One belief with different expressions of that belief. Earthly families do not have total agreement but are held together by the blood line of the family. We can do the same. We can be held together by the Blood of the Lamb who paid the price for our sins and brings us into the Family of God.



Our experience leads us to our varied expressions of our faith. That which matters to us. What we are willing to invest our lives in. Whether salvation or service or justice. Together we can be a strong witness. Divided we become weak. Let us unite in our love for Christ

and in our confession that Jesus is Lord of all. How we live that out can vary immensely. But as a family we can and should support each other in how we live out our Christian Life. God calls us to task and that task can be very different one from another.

The goal is the same. To offer the world healing in the name of Jesus. Let us so live our lives that God is glorified in all that we do and all that we are.

John E. Price

Invite Moderator John Price to your congregation's
worship or special event. Phone or email:
209-480-2778 or moderator@pswdcob.org

Plan to attend District Conference
November 11-13, 2016
at Modesto Church of the Brethren