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## Getting to know you!

I have been on the road a lot during these first several months as District Executive Minister, getting out to meet with pastors and to visit and worship with the congregations of the Pacific Southwest District. As of this writing I have worshiped in 18 of our 26 congregations and, Lord willing, I will have made it to the additional 8 before September is over.

This is a time for me of getting to know the faith communities that make up the PSWD. While I have served in this district for nearly 15 years, most of those Sundays I was present in the church that had called me to serve as their co-pastor. I had met people from other churches at District Conference, camps, and other meetings or workshops, but I had worshiped in very few of our churches. As you can tell that has changed for me in 2015.

Visiting the congregations has been a real blessing to me, experiencing a variety of musical, liturgical, and preaching styles – all lifting up the good news of Jesus in the context in which they are in ministry. In many of the congregations I have been pleased to bring words of greeting and introduction, but preferring for these first visits to simply be present with the congregation in worship rather than bring the message. My goal is to get to know the church, and when someone from the outside (even the close outside of the district minister) brings the message it changes the dynamic of the worship and the flavor isn't quite the same.

I see a great deal of my work and calling in this role as being alongside our pastors and congregations, serving as a supportive partner who can listen well and ask good questions into the place of ministry. I want to understand what is working well for churches and where the struggles are, and knowing that I can hopefully help connect people and churches across our district who have faced or are facing similar ministry questions and help them work and learn together as they serve Christ.

And so I visit, in worship, at Board meetings, at events in the life of the

congregation. I listen and look to experience what God is doing among you, among us. So when you see me say hello, tell me about what God is doing through your church, share with me the struggles you are experiencing, offer up the visions and dreams from God that are stirring in your congregation. Know that I am finding great joy in getting to know you.

Pace y bene (Peace and all good),

*Russ Matteson*

District Executive Minister  
 de@pswdcob.org  
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## DEM's Schedule

Do you wonder where the District Executive Minister is? The answer is that he is out and about, but most always connected. Russ is maintaining his home in Modesto, where Erin continues to serve as the Pastor of the Modesto congregation, and he works part of the month from his base there. He also is working out of the District office in LaVerne at least two weeks a month. Whether he is north or south in California (or in Arizona - he has been there three times in six months) the likelihood is that he is not sitting behind a desk but working to connect with ministers and churches. But here is the good news - if you call his office number and he is there, he will answer. If you call the office number and he is not there, it will forward to his cell phone, and he will answer. If he doesn't, do leave a voicemail and he will get back to you. If you send him an email, he is on that throughout the day, wherever he is, and will get back to you.

Now all of this is true – unless it is Tuesday. Tuesday is Russ' day of rest and renewal and he sets down the work of the district and stays off of his phone and email. So email Russ on Tuesday, but he won't see it until Wednesday, and then he will get back to you.

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from first page*

You will likely get the office voicemail, and he will hear the message on Wednesday. Unless there is an emergency, and then you can reach Russ through the office staff and he will respond. It is hard to get a day of rest in the fullness of the work of ministry, so as best you can, please help Russ to keep his day of Sabbath rest.

## Policy Board Updates

The Spring Meeting of the Policy Board took place April 25 at Hillcrest in La Verne. The Board continued to work in the conversation model and took time to have conversations around the District Conference theme



“Called to be Just Christians,” explored the new Ministerial Leadership polity from Annual Conference, and continued the conversation around new means of district

investments with local congregations. The day also included reports from staff, including an update from Youth Advisor Dawna Welch, who had just returned from Christian Citizenship Seminar. District Executive Minister Russ Matteson shared an update regarding the legal case we are involved in, presented information about the visit to the District from members of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, and shared about conversations that are beginning with potential ministry leaders in the Phoenix area who are interested in Anabaptist movements and for whom the Church of the Brethren might be the spiritual home they are looking for. The next meeting of the Policy Board is August 1, and the agenda will include final work on business for District Conference including the 2016 budget, by-laws updates, and updates to the District’s addendum to the Ministerial Leadership paper.

## Congratulations

\* **Jennifer Scarr (Pomona Fellowship)** has graduated from Bethany Theological Seminary with an M.Div. and has accepted the call to pastor the Trotwood Church of the Brethren in Southern Ohio District. Jen was approved for ordination this Spring, and began her service in mid-June.

\* **Roland Johnson (Modesto)** has accepted the call to pastor the Cabool Church of the Brethren in Missouri / Arkansas. Roland began his work in mid-June.

\* **Barb Saylor (Modesto)** has accepted the call to pastor the Beaver creek Church of the Brethren in Southern Ohio District. She will begin her work there sometime in July. Barb’s husband, Mark Lancaster, has been called as Executive Director of Institutional Advancement for Bethany Theological Seminary.

## Trash Day Pomona May 2015

*by Jessie Marsiglio*

Who could know what this day would hold even with all the explanations given ahead of time. It became everything and more than we thought it would be. Once a year the City of Pomona sets up a local collection site and invites all residents to bring house and yard wastes for disposal without the cost they would have incurred if they had gone to the local dump. For the past 4 years Pomona Fellowship has donated the parking lot for this project. This year Cristo Sion worked alongside with Pomona Fellowship to distribute water to the community and crew. In addition individual members of both congregations spent time speaking to individuals on various topics including church services and the soccer field.

The first city vehicle arrived at 6:00 am and set up the oil station. By noon they had collected 18 drums of oil and 35 oil filters. Soon after 6:00 came the first of the E-waste crew and they were constantly busy loading the 2 extremely large collection trucks with TV’s computers and other e-waste. This started the constant arrival of collection trucks with dump bins. As one bin was filled a truck removed it and replaced it with an empty bin. At noon when the project ended 18 bins were carted away.

We did not keep a total count on the number of vehicles that came to be unloaded, but most times during the day the traffic was backed up out of the parking lot, down the street for over a block. But the wait was not long for anyone; city employees estimate that during the day there were over 100 vehicles per hour. Some vehicles were seen in line 5 times with full loads, one resident came in a U-Haul truck (twice), one rode a bicycle pulling a cart, and one person even dragged a child’s wagon.

Many thanks to all who volunteered for the day (*we didn’t use a sign-in sheet so some names may have inadvertently been omitted here and we apologize for any lapse*): Linda Lovelace and Jessie Marsiglio of the Service and Outreach Commission; Allison Sampson with Eli and Cooper who were our most enthusiastic workers; Jerry Davis; Pastor David Flores and members of Cristo Sion.



Pomona Fellowship and Cristo Sion served water to those in line.

## Thoughts on the Theme

The theme for this year's conference is "Called to be Just Christians." It is based on Matthew 5:1-12 and 25:33-45. We will explore the intended double meaning of the theme throughout the year but as we sit with a time of protests and calls for "justice" in our communities, and our world, there is no better time to reflect on what justice means. Because I am an educator at heart, I find the best way to learn is through conversation and dialog. So I not only hope to update you on my year as moderator and my movings around California and Arizona, but also to use this as a place to talk about being Just Christians, in both senses of the word. If we want to call ourselves Christians, to just be Christians, then we must model our lives and our attitudes after Christ. The very name "Christian" is defined as being Christ-like. Living a Christ-like life can be uncomfortable and uneasy. To walk with the disenfranchised and give comfort to the afflicted is sometimes uncomfortable.

And yet, we are also called to be Just Christians, and seek and provide justice whenever and wherever it is appropriate.

Providing justice is neither comfortable nor easy. But since when did being a Christian mean comfort and ease? Shielding the meek is scary. So too is calling out injustices we see. Not just the big ones, but the everyday ones that exist in our communities

So let's begin the dialog and conversation about being called to be Just Christians. What are your stories of being just a Christian and/or being a Just Christian? When have you or your congregations walked with the poor in spirit, or the mourners, or the meek, or the hungry? When have you worked with the merciful, or been enlightened by the pure of heart? When have you been peacemakers or represented the persecuted? Or better yet, when have you fed the hungry, or given a drink to the thirsty? When did you welcome a stranger and take care of the sick, or visited those imprisoned?

I know because we are Brethren that the stories are out there. And I know that because we are Brethren, we don't talk about what we do. But we are called to do it. And sharing our stories may inspire others to just be Christian or be a Just Christian.

**Eric Bishop**, District Moderator

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[www.pswdcob.org/moderator](http://www.pswdcob.org/moderator)



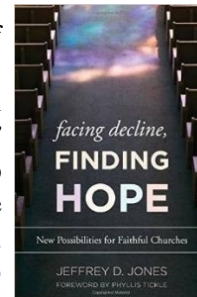
## "Finding Hope"

### Pre-Conference Event for Ministers and Leaders

Ministry Commission welcomes Jeff Jones as leader on Friday, November 13, for a day-long event for pastors and congregational leaders. "Finding Hope" will draw from Jeff's work and help church leadership honestly assess the size of their church and plan for faithful, invigorating services whether membership numbers are up or down. Drawing on biblical and theological resources, and contemporary leadership studies, Jeff will help us learn to set aside a survival mentality and ask new questions to shape ministry more attuned to today's world.

Cost of the workshop will be \$40 per attendee, or \$100 for groups of three or more from the same congregation. Registration includes Friday lunch with the Women's Fellowship, and copies of Jeff's book for all participants. Pastors are encouraged to bring their Board Chair (who also happens to be a delegate), and one or two other leaders from the congregation.

Jeff Jones is Associate Professor of Ministerial Leadership and Director of Ministry Studies at Andover Newton Theological School. You will receive a copy of Jeff's new book: *Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches* at this event.



#### \* Conference Worship Highlights:

- Friday, Eric will introduce the theme "Called to be Just Christians."
- Saturday, Mutual Kumquat will lead us in a concert exploring that same call. Come discover the musicians that inspired our youth at NYC!
- Sunday, our denominational General Secretary, Stan Noffsinger will explore "Called to be Just Christians" with his traveled view of Church of the Brethren work around the world.

\* **Business** will bring reports from local, district and national church leaders. Be ready to call new volunteers to the district's boards, commissions and committees. Your church has at least 4 delegates to consider and vote. Come be a part of the larger body as we work together.

\* **Insight sessions** throughout Saturday will be a wonderful mix of opportunities to interact with the expertise of denominational agencies learning more about topics that matter to us, opportunities to help us understand business better, and sessions that will help enhance specific ministries in meaningful ways!

**Are you intrigued?** Reserve the dates now, and plan to be *surprised, renewed, and enriched* as we gather!



# District Conference November 13-15, 2015 at Hillcrest in La Verne



[www.pswdcob.org/distconf/reg](http://www.pswdcob.org/distconf/reg)

Details on the web

**Reserve your motel early !** *The fairgrounds have the 50th Auto Club NHRA Finals the same weekend.*  
Ask for a reservation under: PSWD Church of the Brethren, 2705 Mountain View Dr. 91750

Motels with special <b>PSWD</b> rate	Miles	Rate (taxes will be added)	Amenities
Extended Stay America. . . . (909) 394-1022 601 W Bonita Ave San Dimas CA	2.6	Rates until November 12 1 King \$94.49 2 Doubles \$94.49 1 Queen \$85.49	Continental breakfast, coin laundry, kitchenette, pet friendly, Wi-Fi
Red Roof Inn. . . . . (909) 599-2362 204 Village Ct San Dimas CA	3.0	Rates until November 5 1 King \$62.99 2 Queens \$62.99	Free pet stay, free Wi-Fi, pool, coin laundry, snack center, hot tub
Double Tree. . . . . (909) 626-2411 555 W Foothill Blvd Claremont CA	3.7	Rates until October 22 1 King \$119.00 2 Doubles \$119.00	Internet, Restaurant, Pool, Fitness center
Diamond Bar Inn & Suites.. (909) 598-0073 *** 3206 Temple Ave Pomona CA	7.3	Rates until November 2 1 King \$89.00 2 Queens \$99.00	Free Wi-Fi, laundry, Pool, Complimentary breakfast, Pet friendly (dogs only + \$25.00 charge)

\*\*\* People had a hard time finding "Diamond Bar Inn & Suites" last year. The group sales person said, Turn at the Chevron station. This is not the hotel at the top of the hill.

**On-Line Registration Goes Live:** Tuesday, August 12, 2015, three months before conference.

## Come enjoy Mutual Kumquat

Performing as a trio, 4-piece or full quintet, Mutual Kumquat has brought it's 'good times revolution music' to audiences across the United States, engaging audiences with positive, clever, and poignant lyrics, strong rhythms, rich harmonies, stick-in-your-head melodies and its unique pop music influenced by bluegrass, funk, jazz, soul, folk, reggae and afrobeat.

Mutual Kumquat is known for creating original songs that speak to the concerns of today, and to working with the classic hymns of faith giving them a fresh take that remains faithful to the original. The group will lead our worship music on Friday and Sunday, and present a worship concert on Saturday evening. Additionally, they will work with our youth, and who knows what other parts of conference.



Mutual Kumquat at NYC 2014  
Photo by Nevin Dulabaum, courtesy of Church of the Brethren

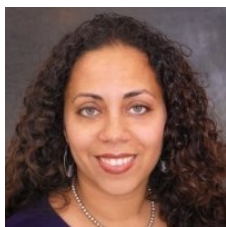
## Sunday Breakfast, 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. November 15th

*Deluxe Continental Breakfast – \$12.00*

### “Seeking Justice in Word and Deed: Who are you fighting for?”

This talk will explore what impels us to action, what motivates us to seek justice, and how we are called by our faith and values to embark on the mission of “walking the walk” and “talking the talk” in fighting for justice, even in the midst of discomfort, fear, and uncertainty in order to be walking embodiments of our faith.

Marisol Morales is the founding director of the Office of Civic and Community Engagement at the University of La Verne. She is responsible for developing university community engagement initiatives in the area of academic service learning, community engaged scholarship, and co-curricular community engagement. In addition, Ms. Morales manages university-community partnerships and the Federal Work Study-Community Service program. She holds a B.A. in Latin America/Latino studies and a M.A./M.S. in International Public Service Management from De Paul University.



## Nursery & Children’s Activities

- Friday & Sunday: NOT Offered.
- All worship times with parents.
- \$12 meals for Children age 10 and under.
- Available until October 26th so we can plan for enough volunteers based on registrations.

### Nursery / Child Care (infants through Pre-K)

\$0 registration + \$0 activity fee = FREE for the weekend

- Saturday: During business and insight sessions, 8:30am-12:15pm & 1:15pm-5:15pm
- All meals are with parents.
- Pickup your child for the Saturday lunch period.

### Children’s Activities (Kindergarten through grade 5)

\$30 registration + \$0 activity fee = \$30 including Saturday lunch (other meals cost extra)

- Saturday: During business and insight sessions.
- Activity may include: Bible stories, exploration of the conference theme “Called to be Just Christians,” making cookies, games, crafts and snacks.

#### Advanced Registration On-Line:

- Opens August 12 at 9:00 a.m.
- Closes October 26 at midnight.
- Saves you money!
- More choices in activities and insight sessions.
- Reserve special meals at Hillcrest.

#### Late on-site Registration at Hillcrest in La Verne:

- After October 26, your options are limited.
- Late and all on-site registrations will incur the \$25 late fee for individuals or \$50 for families.
- Special Meals can not be purchased on site.
- After October 26th there will be:
  - NO nursery or childcare registrations
  - NO youth activity registrations
  - NO meal availability

### Two Part Delegate Registration

- 1) Congregation fills out an on-line “Delegate Credential Card” for each delegate, but does not register them for District Conference. No cost for the Delegate Credential Card.
- 2) Each delegate registers online: You are responsible for completing your \$80 registration by the October 26, 2015 deadline (meals & lodging extra).

### Registration Cost:

- \$80 delegates (meals & lodging extra)
- \$60 adults (meals & lodging extra)
- \$60 youth grades 6-12 (activities included)
- \$30 children grades K-5 (activities included)
- Children under 5 are free (meals & lodging extra)

### New Children’s meal discount:

- Age 10 and under can purchase meals for \$12.

### Activities Included in Registration:

**Youth activities**, Friday after worship through Sunday morning, includes 3 meals Saturday & breakfast Sunday. (Friday meals are *extra*)

**Children’s Saturday activities** (K-5). During Business and Insight Sessions. Lunch is included.

**Nursery Care** (infant-pre-K). During Business and Insight Sessions. *Lunch is not included*, parents pick up their children for lunch.

Activities are **not available with late registration**.

# THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

EDITOR: CYNTHIA WOOLEVER—WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

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## COULD LACK OF CURIOSITY KILL THE CHURCH?

The proverbial expression that curiosity killed the cat highlights the danger of probing the unknown. However, the original phrase means something entirely different—that care or worry could wear out nine cat's lives.<sup>1</sup> Even early Christians gave caution about excessive inquiry, believing that curiosity was corrosive to the soul. Saint Augustine wrote, "God fashioned hell for the inquisitive." But can too little curiosity hurt the church?

### What Is Curiosity?

Lack of information motivates some people to ask questions in order to fill in their knowledge gaps. Curious people have a passion for knowing more, expanding learning, and solving problems. They are the ones who ask the most penetrating questions. Curious individuals possess a powerful drive to make sense of the world.

We think of children as curious about anything new. According to Ian Leslie, author of *Curious*, the attraction to anything novel is different from the kind of disciplined curiosity seen in creative adults.<sup>2</sup> Leslie calls this deeper, more effortful and mature type epistemic curiosity. These curious adults possess a strong desire for knowledge and understanding, which motivates them to learn new ideas. They relish problem solving. He also describes another linked form, empathic curiosity, where individuals exhibit great interest in the thoughts and feelings of other people.

Psychologists discovered that curiosity levels vary across individuals. A curiosity measure, the need for cognition (NFC), reveals that many people reach a comfortable level of knowledge and feel no push to learn more. Leslie believes that our access to easy answers led us to forget how to ask questions—what he terms the Wikipedia problem.

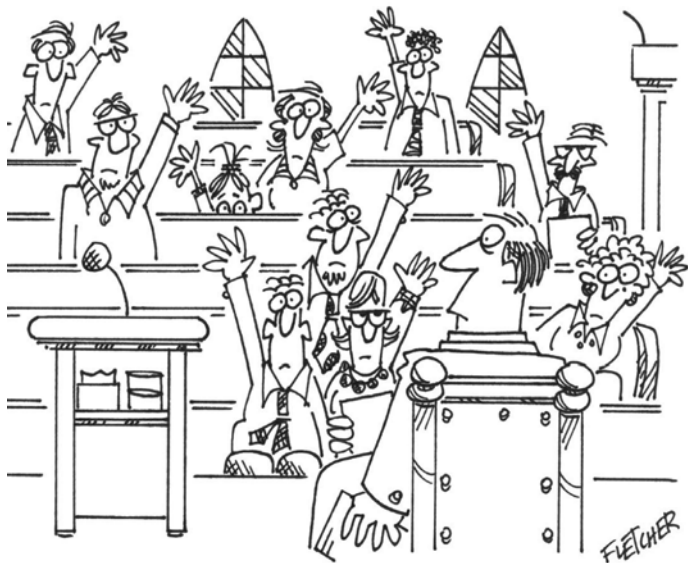
Is there an equivalent NFC measure for congregations and their leaders? And, if so, how would your congregation measure up? Ultimately, are churches that reject curiosity also rejecting viability?

### What Are the Traits of a Curious Congregation?

*A curious congregation is never satisfied with the status quo.* While some churches get stuck in their misconceptions, curious churches focus on what is unfolding before them. They are the first to recognize that God is at work and see their holy ministry partnership in the church and community. Unfortunately, success often makes church leaders less curious because if it's not broken, why fix it?

*Curious leaders are less concerned about rules and appearances than with what works.* Although these leaders take the long view, they do not find the present boring. Rather, the details of current ministry efforts generate more opportunities to expand learning and experimentation.

*Truly curious churches experience frustration at their information gaps and that fuels their desire to learn more.* Leslie writes that we have an unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance. Some congregations practice strategic ignorance because lack of knowledge requires no action. The first step toward cultivating curiosity is to become



PASTOR TED REALIZED HE HAD A CURIOUS CONGREGATION  
WHEN THE QUESTIONS BEGAN DURING  
THE ORGAN PRELUDE.

aware of how much is still unknown. And real curiosity requires considerable effort and time. Unfortunately, congregations are prone to social loafing—what Leslie defines as the widespread tendency of individuals to decrease their own effort when working collaboratively.

*Curious congregations demonstrate empathic curiosity.* They respect feelings and place a high value on being a caring community. Therefore, empathically curious churches project positive impressions to the community. They are opposite from those churches known as “fighting and firing churches.”<sup>3</sup> Non-empathic churches treat the pastor and staff poorly, ignore fair processes, and seem unwilling to stop a few members from accumulating inappropriate power. Too many of their members see the church in a possessive light—as a place to get *their* needs fulfilled.

*Curious congregations develop skills in turning puzzles into mysteries.* The internet creates an illusion that every question has a definitive answer. However, Leslie makes a distinction between puzzles and mysteries. Puzzles get clear answers and begin with questions like How many? and Where? Mysteries ask the more complex questions, which cannot be answered definitely. The curious church realizes that there are many things we cannot know. They work within these parameters to make continuous, and constantly changing, improvements instead of singular improvements for the short term.

*Finally, curious congregations are willing to make choices.* Fear and anxiety kill curiosity and keep churches locked in place. Curiosity can be more powerful than courage in the face of obstacles. Organizations that are fascinated by what they don't yet know are the least likely to be caught off guard by change.

### Ask the Big Why

Beginning in the 1930s, social scientists moved away from asking *why* people behaved in particular ways and instead studied what they could observe people doing. These behaviorists took pride in the accumulation of objective observations without the subjective taint of invisible motivations. A more recent phenomenon is the perceived power that Big Data made possible by the processing of massive amounts of information. Proponents of data believe that numbers can speak for themselves.

One example of Big Data usage, the Failed State Index, was designed to measure and predict the states around the world close to collapse. Despite drawing from 130,000 data sources, the index did not predict the Arab Spring in 2012. Only experts with in-depth knowledge of

the region's history, culture, and needs could provide insight into *why* the events unfolded.

A curious congregation is always composed of people with deep faith, relationships, traditions, and history. Their willingness to dig deeper and ask *why* questions yield the most profound insights. Most questions tend to be the type where answers fit neatly. However, if the right question isn't asked, an insightful answer has nowhere to go.

### Some Curious Questions

Even while many may still believe the current implication of the phrase curiosity killed the cat, the retort, and satisfaction brought him back, has also gained popularity. This reply takes back the original meaning and highlights the importance of asking curious questions. Below are just a few examples of questions that curious congregations can ask. How will your congregation respond?

- What congregational activities and programs are going well? Why is that the case? What activities and programs do we wish were more effective? Why are they less effective?
- Thinking about your current and previous pastors, what leadership approach seemed to fit your church best? Why do you think that approach was most effective at that time?
- What are the congregation's core values that help explain members' motivations and behaviors? What process is the church using to examine and transform desired values into core values?
- Is our congregation a neighborhood church where most worshipers live nearby or is it a non-geographical congregation, drawing worshipers from a wider area? Why do we believe we are called to serve in this location?
- If our church leaders could travel back in time to twenty years ago, what message would they deliver to those in our congregation? Would those earlier leaders listen and act on that message? Why not?
- Will the passage of time expand or contract our church's attractive options? Why?

1. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/curiosity-killed-the-cat.html>.

2. Material drawn from Ian Leslie, *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), whose work describes curious individuals.

3. Thom S. Rainer, “Nine Traits of Mean Churches,” <http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/23/nine-traits-mean-churches/>.

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# New Life

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## 2015 District Conference Youth Event (grades 6-12)

Come enjoy a great weekend of fellowship, worship, Mutual Kumquat concert, and activities with youth from around the PSWD! Register for conference (\$60) and Youth Activities are included free with Saturday's meals.

Highlights of our time together will include catching up with friends from around the district, planning and participating in an awesome Saturday worship service and other special activities just for the YOUth!

On-site housing will be available for High school aged Youth. If there are more than 3 youth from a congregation your church needs to register an adult advisor who will be present at all youth events through the weekend, (including, potentially, an overnight sleep over). Schedule on the web.

Questions? Call or email Dawna Welch  
909-267-5477 youth@pswdcob.org  
[www.pswdcob.org/distconf/reg/youth](http://www.pswdcob.org/distconf/reg/youth)



PSWD Youth at the Christian Citizenship Conference

## Blessed are... When did we see you?...



These words are the center of the theme for the 52nd District Conference November 13-15 at Hillcrest Homes in La Verne. The program committee has been working on planning a conference that will ideally move the mind and the spirit. "*Called to be Just Christians,*" will challenge us to look at the decisions we make in today's life and how those decisions impact the greater good of society.

In addition to hearing the moderator's interpretation of the theme, based on Matthew 5:1-12 and 25:33-45, conference-goers will hear from Church of the Brethren General Secretary Stan Noffsinger. An additional treat is that Mutual Kumquat will provide musical leadership throughout the conference and lead us in a special worship.

A number of thought-provoking insight sessions will be offered for all attendees that will engage our intellect and our spirituality. We hope you will come and join us as we worship, fellowship and dialogue in a justice centered atmosphere.

*Eric Bishop*, moderator@pswdcob.org

Discover more about the  
November 13-15 District Conference  
within this newsletter