

District Executive Minister's Report

Russ Matteson

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:20b

Much of my preaching this year has focused around our need to remember that God is with us and does not leave us, and the call for us to pay attention to the faithful guidance that God provides. I preach these words as much to myself as for the congregations that I am sharing with in worship. I have found a deep sense of assurance that the words above, the last words of Jesus to his disciples in the gospel of Matthew, are a call to awareness that Jesus is with us always and inviting us to remember that in all that we are part of. The year has been filled with opportunities that have called us to be open to the faithful leading of Christ among us. As our moderator has reminded us throughout the year we need to focus on Jesus. Leadership in the district has sought to be faithful to the call and to the way of Jesus as we have moved out in ministry. I give thanks to God for the work of the Spirit in the ministry shared by the Pacific Southwest District during this past year.

We continue to be guided in our work by the PSWD Core Objective of *supporting congregations in being vital and healthy communities of faith that embody and share distinctive Brethren ways of Christian belief and action*. The work of the District staff has focused around:

- 1) support of Spanish language ministries and congregations;
- 2) support of new church projects in place and development;
- 3) support of congregations that are getting smaller and looking at next steps in their ministry;
- 4) refocusing of the PSWD Youth Ministry;
- 5) engaging the district in conversation around Christ's leading for investing of new resources.

Support of Spanish language ministries and congregations – With the addition of the Los Banos new church project in 2017, and the Las Vegas project in 2018, we now have five ministries that primarily worship and operate in Spanish. In February Gilbert Romero, Ministry Training Coordinator, and I hosted a gathering of Spanish speaking ministry leadership which brought together licensed ministers and pastors for a day of sharing and fellowship. We were joined by Roxanne

Aguirre, Spanish Language Training Coordinator for the Brethren Academy, who had time with SeBAH and EPMC students to provide information and conversation around these programs. The group greatly appreciated the time together and we are committed to finding other times to gather again and continue to build relationships.

In April the Nurturing & Credentialing Committee recommended Rigo and Margie Berumen, and Luz Roman for licensing, and those services took place in June. The licensing in Las Vegas included a visit from Annual Conference Moderator Samuel Sarpiya who assisted, and the first baptisms of that congregation.

Gilbert Romero, who began as MTC in September 2017, has been busy staying in contact with all of the licensed ministers and encouraging them in their given course of study. This includes regular calls and visits with the students, and interface with the Brethren Academy around program details and courses. The EPMC program is really being piloted in our district, with David and Rita Flores using it to finish their training, and it's first full engagement with the leaders (lay and ministry) in Los Banos and Las Vegas. The work in these two locations will get underway this fall. The SeBAH program is offering courses on a regular basis and we are nearing completion of this training by three of our licensed ministers. This July saw the district and the Brethren Academy's new Julie Hostetter Scholarship Fund supporting these three licensed ministers in attending Annual Conference in Cincinnati and meeting the program requirement related to this event.

All of the credentialing related paperwork is now translated into Spanish so that when our licensed ministers move towards ordination, and new licensed ministers come along that need resources in Spanish, they will be available. We contracted with Richard Zapata to do this translation work, and we will be sharing the denominational related pieces with the national Office of Ministry to be used by other districts as well. We are also updating policies that imposed extra costs and time burdens on ministry candidates who are most comfortable in Spanish to create a more hospitable and equitable credentialing process.

And we are looking into ways to continue to live into the bilingual nature of our district. More

communication from the District office to pastors is now sent in both English and Spanish. We are looking at the possibilities of having leadership for the Pastor/Spouse Retreat who can resource in both languages. The 2019 pre-conference minister's event will focus on Intercultural Hermeneutics and will engage leaders across languages. There are still areas to explore, but we are working to embrace who we are and are becoming as a district.

Support of new Church projects in place and development – It is a joy to see leadership coming forward and new Brethren communities of faith taking shape and reaching out with the good news of Jesus in their communities.

At District Conference 2017 the Los Banos project, led by Pastors Rigo and Margie Berumen, was introduced. This group has continued to grow in worship and outreach over the past year and now has a community of 70-90 persons who are related to the congregation, with steady attendance of 40-50 people for services. There is a strong ministry reaching out to and supporting marriages with monthly gatherings that strengthen the spiritual lives of the couples. Additionally, programs for youth and children continue to grow. The group has taken the name Centro Agape en Acción Iglesia de los Hermanos for this ministry as they seek to live into Los Banos as a community that puts God's love into action.

In January 2018 the Executive Board, upon recommendation of the Church Planting Task Group, named the work being done by Pastor Luz Roman in Las Vegas, Nevada, a project of the district. Luz is from the Dominican Republic, met the Church of the Brethren in Pennsylvania, and has some pastoral experience with a church in Boston. She felt God calling her to come to Las Vegas and begin a ministry, and she and her husband Orlando relocated to Las Vegas in 2016. As she was beginning to gather a group for worship and study, Luz reached out to her former Brethren pastor who put her in contact with leadership of the Renacer Hispanic Brethren Church Planting work, who connected her with our District. They meet in a very small rented room of a house, and over the course of the last many months the owner of the home has come to know Jesus and get involved in the church and was one of the first persons baptized by the congregation. Under the name Iglesia Cristiana Elohim (una Iglesia de los Hermanos) the group has about 35-40 people who relate to the congregation.

The District is working to support church

planting efforts with training for leadership and financial support to help overcome barriers to growth. The hope and plan is that projects will have a window of three to five years of financial support to move to the space of being able to support themselves in ministry.

In both of our current projects the need for new meeting and ministry space has been identified as a critical next step and so we have invested a good deal of time and effort into finding new space. In both the Las Vegas and Los Banos locations the local real estate markets have shown that opportunities are present to invest in property for ministry space that will provide larger facilities at a lower cost than leasing space. We are prepared to invest up to \$1,000,000 of our district funds in securing property. These will be loans to the projects structured like our loans to other district congregations. And as principal resources are returned we will have funds to invest in future opportunities. District Church Planting Support funds will help the projects with making their payment and decrease as they grow and are able to cover these costs from their resources. The groups will also be building equity towards moving to larger spaces as they grow.

2018 was the year for the biennial Church of the Brethren Church Planting Conference and we sent our church planters, a potential church planter, and two members of the district task group to the event. This provided good connection to the larger denomination for our new leaders, in addition to renewing worship and helpful sessions on church growth. Members of the Church Planting Task Group were inspired to consider creating a similar event here to encourage potential church planters and those who want to support these efforts in our district. Watch for news in the months ahead as plans develop.

As we have opened ourselves to God's leading in this area, others in the district are stepping forward with possible new church projects. At this point there are people prayerfully considering if the call of Christ is for them to start new ministries. We hope that you will hold the new work underway and under consideration in your prayers for God's guidance and blessing in the days ahead.

Support of congregations that are getting smaller and looking at next steps in their ministry – Work this year has also been with those congregations that may be nearing the end of their ministry, or who are committed to work at renewal and retooling of their

ministry to move into the future. Pomona Fellowship worked with their interim pastor Jeff Glass to intentionally look at these questions and is embarking on a course that will have them relocate their ministry and sell the current facility. I am working with them to find pastoral leadership that can help them claim the new ministry that God is leading them towards. The San Diego congregation spent the beginning of the year starting the Vital Ministry Journey to identify and plan for where God is leading their ministry. The work of implementation continues as they take steps focused on strengthening their ministry work. Tucson has been intentional in considering their situation and after more than a year of discernment has determined that they will end their ministry at the end of 2018. They remain hopeful that there may be a Church of the Brethren ministry again in Tucson. Other congregations are in various stages of consideration and prayerful conversation about where God is leading them in these days.

Refocusing of the PSWD Youth Ministry – In January Nohemi Flores began serving as the District Youth Advisor, and the immediate focus for the year was organizing and supporting the effort to get district youth to National Youth Conference 2018. With transitions in this position we were a bit behind and this became the priority for the year. We remain committed to strengthening the ministry of and with our youth and intend to give this more attention in the year ahead.

Engaging the district in conversation around Christ's leading for investing of new resources – At the beginning of 2018 a deal was in place to sell the lot we owned in Koreatown, and so the District Board began conversation around how the District might use the substantial resources that would come from the sale. We determined that the churches of the district should be invited into the conversation about where Christ might be leading us with regards to investing these funds in ministry. This fall and into next year members of the Board are visiting in churches and leading a worshipful conversation to help the district broaden the conversation and gather prayerful input. The ideas and information from these meetings will guide conversations of the Board in 2019 with the expectation that District Conference next year will hear recommendations regarding the ministry investment of those funds.

Pastoral/Congregational Transitions

- Bakersfield – Alan McLearn-Montz was called as pastor and began his ministry there in January. Alan, his wife Brenda, and one of their adult children, relocated to California from Iowa.

- Cornerstone Reedley – Robert Aguirre resigned as pastor in January and is pursuing other ministry opportunities at this time. The congregation is using lay leadership and discerning what is next for them in terms of pastoral leadership.

- Glendale – In January new pastor Randy Short received a serious cancer diagnosis. He continued to serve the congregation with energy and passion until his death in July of this year. Annali Murray, a licensed minister and recent Fuller Seminary graduate, will serve as their interim pastor. A search committee is forming and they hope to call a new pastor soon to continue the positive momentum that they are feeling.

- Laton – The congregation has been using lay leadership and guest speakers since early 2017 as speakers on Sunday mornings. The leadership of the congregation is strong and they continue in ministry with one another and in reaching the community.

- Modesto – The search continues under the guidance of Southern Ohio District Executive Minister Dave Shetler. Mike Fletcher will end his time as interim pastor in November after 16 months of leadership there. We are working on another interim pastor to provide leadership until a settled pastor is called.

- Pomona Fellowship – Jeff Glass ended his service as interim pastor in May after 22 months of service. A search committee is currently interviewing candidates to serve as the new pastor.

- South Bay – Philip Heidt resigned as pastor in August after 12 years of leadership with this congregation. During his service he helped the congregation discover and move into their partnership with Journey Evangelical Covenant Church and the shared renovation of the church facility. Philip has taken a call in a Christian Reformed congregation in Tualatin, Oregon. Philip has moved his ordination to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The shared ministry at South Bay/Journey will be exploring what the next steps in replacing Philip's leadership will look like.

Professional Growth – This year the Council of

District Executives participated in a 2 day event as guests of Bethany Theological Seminary. We engaged in four ½ day courses led by professors in the areas of Bible, Worship, Christology, and Leadership. There was also significant time to interact with students, staff and faculty, deepening our connection with this portion of our denominational life. I also participated in the Church Planting Conference with the team from our district.

Council of District Executives – Much of our shared conversation during the last year has been around the development and implementation of the Compelling Vision process by the denomination. We are prayerfully hopeful that this conversation will help the denomination renew our commitment to shared vision and ministry. The conversation at District Conference, and a few additional opportunities to be part of the conversation in the district, will feed into conversations happening across the denomination and guiding all of our work at Annual

Conference 2019. I encourage individuals to be a part of the conversation, and for each church to send their delegate to Annual Conference. I continue to represent the Council at the On Earth Peace Board table, attending the two board meetings and various video conferences between those meetings.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve among you as District Executive Minister. It is a gift to visit and worship in our churches, share in the work of beginning new ministries and supporting existing ones, and work at the struggles we face as a district and individual congregations. Your prayers for one another, for our shared ministry, and for the work of your staff are deeply appreciated. I look forward to where Christ will lead us in the year ahead.

Pace e bene (Peace and all good),

Russ Matteson

District Executive Minister

Deceased Ministers

Robert E. Keim - 2/20/1926 – 4/20/2018

ordained for 70 years

Randall Scott Short - 3/31/1968 – 7/11/2018

Recognition of Ministers' Ordination Anniversaries

65 Years

James E. Daughtry

60 Years

Robert T. Neher

Galen R. Snell

55 Years

Thomas Deal

Glenn R. Stanford

Gene E. Wenger

50 Years

Gene F. Hipskind

40 Years

Nelda Rhoades Clarke

35 Years

Catherine “Cady” Laycook

25 Years

Erin Matteson

Russ Matteson

Janet Ober Lambert

Gilbert Romero

Zandra Wagoner

**Representing 600 years
of service.**

TRIM Supervisor Report. Russ Matteson
See also Ministry Commission report on page 22.

At the present time we have one student in the Training in Ministry program of the Brethren Academy. He continues to make progress towards completion of his educational program. TRIM allows students who cannot relocate to the Seminary to complete an approved program of study that prepares them for ministry. Often, as is our case, the individual is both a student and an active minister at the same time.

Russ Matteson, TRIM Coordinator

MTC: Ministry Training Coordinator: SeBAH, EFSM, EPMC Report. Gilbert Romero
See also Ministry Commission report on page 22.

In my role as MTC (Ministry Training Coordinator) for the district, I have found that although there are many challenges, our current team makes everything work! I have a wonderful job centered on putting people that have been called to ministry in the Church of the Brethren, into the training programs EFSM: Education for Shared Ministry, EPMC: Educación para Ministerio Compartido, and SeBAH: Seminario Biblico Anabautista Hispano. Then I follow-up with calls and emails encouraging the licensed ministers as they move through the training, and keep them connected to resources.

I look forward with joy to the Los Banos “Centro Agape en Acción” and Las Vegas “Iglesia Cristiana Elohim” church plants joining the EPMC program in the fall. Pastor Nick Corral of Cristo Genesis is exploring starting some of his leadership in the EPMC program. Mercedes Zapata is on track to move from SeBAH training to ordination this fall.

As our work moves forward, I pray that we continue to grow churches and ministers into the future.

Gilbert Romero, MTC

Youth Advisor Report. Nohemi Flores

I began my journey as the PSWD Youth Advisor in January 2018, I have desire to see youth to be called in following Jesus and loving their neighbor as they would treat others as they would like to be done to them. Over these months, youth have gathered together by the PSWD Youth Cabinet organization of activities.

In February, I had the privilege of providing NYC resources for youth at Camp La Verne’s Winter Camp. In July, I traveled with 54 youth and advisors to Ft. Collins, Colorado for National Youth Conference. In both instances I experienced youth who are engaged and curious, creative and enthusiastic about being the church. They have varying beliefs and Christian foundations but they seem uniquely capable of encouraging each other’s authentic expressions of faith.

Three such youth have been called to serve on the 2018/2019 Youth Cabinet. Their names and congregations are: Ivan Gonzalez (Príncipe de Paz), Sharon Maldonado (Iglesia de Cristo Sion), and Elizabeth Piazza (Live Oak). The new Youth Cabinet had their first planning meeting / retreat in August, gathering in La Verne, California to plan activities at District Conference for the youth. During their time together the cabinet participated in team building exercises, toured Hillcrest facilities, worked with PSWD Moderator-Elect Bob Morris, and worshiped with youth at Príncipe de Paz Friday evening, and Sunday morning with youth at La Verne Church of the Brethren.

Youth attending the 2018 District Conference, can expect another great year of fellowship and fun with friends throughout the district. Plus, opportunities to explore the theme of conference, *Focus on Jesus*, it’s scriptural foundation and implications for youth as we move forward as a district and the body of Christ! Housing arrangements have been made for Senior High youth only at Hillcrest, all other activities and meals will include Junior High youth as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Pacific Southwest District and continue this journey of faith with the Youth of our district.

Nohemi Flores. District Youth Advisor