

District Executive Minister's Report

Russ Matteson

As we gathered for District Conference 2018 we were in prayer for the members of our congregation in Paradise, CA, and for their community as the Camp Fire was burning its way through the town. The small group of Brethren, and their partners in ministry from The Rock, all survived the fire, but many suffered the losses of their homes and all of the contents and are in the position of trying to start over. The Church building, the parsonage, and a few rental units were all lost to the fire, and the small congregation indicated to us that this was the end of ministry for them as a congregation.

Soon after the fire the District began to receive inquiries about how churches and individuals in our district and throughout the denomination could reach out in support to the Brethren impacted by the fire. The Executive Board established the Paradise Emergency Fund to receive donations that we could pass along as gifts to those affected. Over the last nine months donations of \$133,000 were received and shared with seven households that were identified by the church's leadership. Many of these individuals were not sufficiently insured for the losses, and these gifts have been most helpful to them in working to move forward.

As District Executive Minister I have been serving as the legal agent for the congregation since December and working to file paperwork with local authorities for cleanup of the property and with the church's insurance carrier. I am grateful for the help from Gail and Mike McCann, and Pastor Melvin and Jane Campbell, in keeping me aware of things going on in Paradise and coordinating on items related to insurance and cleanup. At this time the property has been cleaned and all debris removed, and we are awaiting word on soil samples to see if additional cleaning will be needed before any other work can be done. There are likely to be some cleanup costs that we will be billed for sometime in 2020. We do not intend to rebuild this building or continue the Brethren presence there. The District has received the proceeds from the insurance settlement from Brotherhood Mutual and a proposal for how those will be used is included in the business for this meeting.

I encourage us all to continue to hold the town of Paradise, and those who were/are it's residents in our prayers as the journey ahead is long, and the grief for what has been lost continues.

Dali's Visit PSWD

In February we were pleased to host Samuel and Rebecca Dali, leaders from EYN (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) at many locations throughout the district. The vision to invite them came from pastors Sara Haldeman-Scarr and Alan McLearn-Montz. The PSWD covered the cost of bringing them out, and local churches hosted them and helped get them from one place to the next. During their week in California they shared with Bakersfield, McFarland, Los Banos, Empire, Modesto, Live Oak, Pomona Fellowship, and San Diego.

Focus of Work

The day in and day out work of the District Executive Minister involves interacting regularly with our various congregations, trying to worship with each church at least annually, visiting with pastors and other leaders, providing support in times of discernment or conflict, working with the District Board to plan and implement direction in ministry for the district, and many other things that are part of this ministry call. I continue to drive about 25,000 miles each year getting around to places, and flying to those connections where driving is not practical.

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*. As a part of working on that, my time as District Executive Minister has again this year focused around:

- 1) support of Spanish language ministries / 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.

Spanish Language Churches/New Church Projects

These areas, while separate, contain a significant amount of overlap since the two existing projects and one new project are Spanish language ministries. The work of training for ministry has

stabilized both within the district and at the denomination over the last year. We have our first graduate from EPMC with another close behind, several licensed ministers are nearing completion of all the requirements for SEBAH, and the two new church projects have begun their training work with congregational leaders through EPMC.

At the district level we are working to regularly provide resources and communication in both Spanish and English, moving into the reality of our district's makeup. This past year we had meetings in person and through Zoom with our Spanish speaking leaders. The Pastors' Retreat in May was intentionally a bi-lingual experience (we are grateful for the leadership of Daniel Topf who shared the presentations in both Spanish and English). And the upcoming pre-Conference event for pastors and leaders will be intentional about taking place in both English and Spanish.

The Las Vegas project, Iglesia Cristiana Elohim, is now subletting space from another church, and is being supported by District Church Planting funds to rent two additional rooms for use in children's ministry. This summer they hosted a once a week Children's Bible School at an apartment complex near one of their member's home, and had a regular group of about 20 children participate. The worshipping community is a faithful group, and they are making connections with many recent immigrants and those on the margins in Las Vegas.

The Los Banos project, Centro Agape en Acción, continues to reach out in their community. They are regularly at (or beyond) space capacity in the space they sublease, and we have worked hard to help them find a new home. The District has finished due diligence and is moving forward with the purchase of a commercial building in Los Banos that will serve as their worship and community space. One half of the purchase will be a district investment (diversifying into property) and will produce income from two existing renters, while the other half will be leased with movement to ownership to Centro Agape en Acción. We will support them in this effort with Church Planting Funds for the next few years. And as they grow, and the tenant leases expire, the church will be able to take ownership of more of the property.

And beginning on the ground work this September is a new project looking to bring a Spanish language congregation to Waterford. Florecita Merlos, her husband Jose, and their youngest daughter Hillary, have moved into the parsonage the District owns in Waterford and she is

beginning to get to know and reach out to the people there. The Church Planting Task Group, when talking with Florecita about her plans, reminded her to take time to fall in love with the place and the people as she sees what God is already doing and calling this new ministry to join. We had kept the property (parsonage and church) in Waterford in hopes that God might lead us into a new beginning there. Your prayers for this ministry's beginning are appreciated.

Support of congregations that are getting smaller

You have read earlier about the Paradise congregation, and will take action at this District Conference to Disorganize the Tucson church. There was a celebration of Tucson's ministry and time of blessing for the church that purchased the building held in January. Pomona Fellowship is working with a developer who plans to purchase their property. The congregation is working on plans for where they will go next and what the shape and form of their ministry will look like in the years ahead.

Refocusing of District Youth Ministry

The plan now is to convene a group to work at this question in 2020. If you have suggestions of people who might serve on this committee, please share those names with me.

Conversations around investing resources

The Policy Board is pleased to bring a proposal to this District Conference that is the result of two years of listening and praying for God's guidance on what we might do with the resources gained from the sale of the parking lot in Los Angeles. This discernment intentionally sought out input from our congregations, last year's district conference, and the Policy Board working together to bring this plan to the Conference. If approved, there is still work to do in preparing how to distribute the funds and continuing communication about these possibilities. My thanks to all who participated in the conversations, and especially to Dot Hess, board vice-chair, who undertook the task of compiling and tabulating all of the reports from the meetings for the Board to work with in discerning a direction forward.

Pastoral/Congregational Transitions

Glendale - Annali Topf completed her interim work in May as the congregation called Robert Aguirre to serve as their pastor and he began his service in June.

Modesto - Mike Fletcher completed his work as

interim in November, 2018. Stephen Reddy, a member of the congregation, served as interim from January through May. The congregation called Andrew Sampson to be the pastor and he began his call in June. Andrew, his wife Allison, and their two sons moved to Modesto from Fort Wayne, IN. Andrew formerly served in PSWD at Pomona Fellowship.

Pomona Fellowship - Lauren Seganos Cohen was called by the congregation as pastor in November, 2018, and began her service in December. Lauren relocated to PSWD with her husband, Jason, last summer from Maine.

Church Denominational

Across the denomination, Districts were busy hosting the Compelling Vision conversations at more local levels which then came together to inform the full business of Annual Conference in July. In our district, the Executive Board decided to make funds available to encourage each church that has not usually sent a delegate to do so by offering to cover significant portions of the cost of attending. This was because we felt the church wide conversation important enough to have as many voices as possible present, and since the every six year attempt to bring the conference to the west (and thus be more affordable) was not happening. Ten congregations took advantage of the opportunity, at a cost to the district of \$15,000, and this effectively

doubled the number of our churches present in the conversation. The Compelling Vision Committees are now processing the information gathered at Annual Conference and are preparing a response that will be part of the business in 2020 in Grand Rapids, MI. I would encourage your continuing prayers for the Church of the Brethren, as it works on the Compelling Vision process and other concerns which threaten to divide the church.

Conclusion

I am grateful to the many who serve on the District Board and our various committees that carry out the work and mission of the PSWD. It is the sharing of their time and gifts that are so important. And I appreciate, and hope you do as well, the work of our staff consisting of Joe Vecchio, Gilbert Romero, and Nohemi Flores. Your prayers for the work we do together, and as individual congregations, are deeply appreciated. As our moderator Bob Morris has reminded us with his theme this year, apart from Christ we can do nothing. May we remain connected to Christ and through that connection to one another. Amen.

Pace e bene, Paz y bien, Peace and all good,

Russ Matteson

District Executive Minister

Deceased Ministers

Ralph E. Click - 4/18/1929 – 9/22/2018
Marlin L. Heckman - 1/20/1937 – 9/22/2018
Jo Kimmel - 2/11/1931 – 9/7/2019

Recognition of Ministers' Ordination Anniversaries

70 Years

Gene Palsgrove

55 Years

Gerald L. Moore

40 Years

Jeffrey E. Glass

Tom Hostetler

30 Years

Jeanine Ewert

25 Years

Terry R. Mathis

Representing 255 years
of service.

TRIM Supervisor Report. Russ Matteson
See also Ministry Commission report on page 21.

This summer Nohemi Flores entered the TRIM program to continue her educational preparation for ministry. She attended orientation at Bethany Theological Seminary in July and is taking her first on-line courses. Jody Romero continues to make progress towards completing his course work.

Russ Matteson, TRIM Coordinator

MTC: Ministry Training Coordinator: SeBAH, EFSM, EPMC Report. Gilbert Romero
See also Ministry Commission report on page 21.

In my role as MTC (Ministry Training Coordinator) for the district I find that through the 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.

Mercedes Zapata was ordained last fall, and now helps advise some of the students. I thank God for the Los Banos “Centro Agape en Acción” and Las Vegas “Iglesia Cristiana Elohim” church plants. Both have joined the EPMC program and are working on their studies with one book completed and the next starting in September. They are great in their fellowship and moving forward in their quest for working together. “Príncipe de Paz” pastors Richard and Becky Zapata will conclude their SeBAH program shortly. “Iglesia de Cristo Sion” pastor David Flores has completed EPMC and received a certificate of completion. Pastor Rita will continue her EPMC classes until complete. Floresita Merlos continues in SeBAH, and is ready to use her great leadership skills in beginning a new church start in Waterford. The above named students will complete their programs and classes in the next one and a half years.

I am truly blessed to be a part of the district’s Ministry Training. Thank you for the opportunity.

Gilbert Romero, MTC

Youth Advisor Report. Nohemi Flores

I began my journey as the PSWD Youth Advisor in January 2018, I have the desire to see youth called in following Jesus and loving their neighbor as they would treat others as they would like to be done to them. The leadership role that the district Youth Cabinet and district Youth Advisor have in the PSWD is to organize events for youth throughout the year, and to be united.

Since last year, there have been 5 major activities where youth have been gathering more in fellowship at locations like Santa Ana, La Verne/ San Dimas (District Conference), Colorado for NYC, Bakersfield (Spring Fling), and Pomona (Summer Youth Retreat), and the upcoming Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. At every event, youth are growing, learning, maturing, but most of all doing all things in good faith. What has been exciting is to see more and more youth are actively looking to meet more in the year.

Four youth have been called to serve on the 2019/2020 Youth Cabinet, Toshiro Gomez (South Bay), Ivan Gonzalez (Príncipe de Paz), Abraham Rosas (Glendale), Sharon Maldonado (Iglesia de Cristo Sion) They met in August.

Youth attending the 2019 District Conference, can expect another great year of fellowship and fun with friends throughout the district. Plus, opportunities to explore the theme at conference, *Apart from me, you can do nothing John 15:5*, it’s scriptural foundation and implications for youth as we move forward as a district and the body of Christ!

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



2019-2020 Youth Cabinet & Advisor
Nohemi, Sharon, Toshiro, Abraham, Ivan